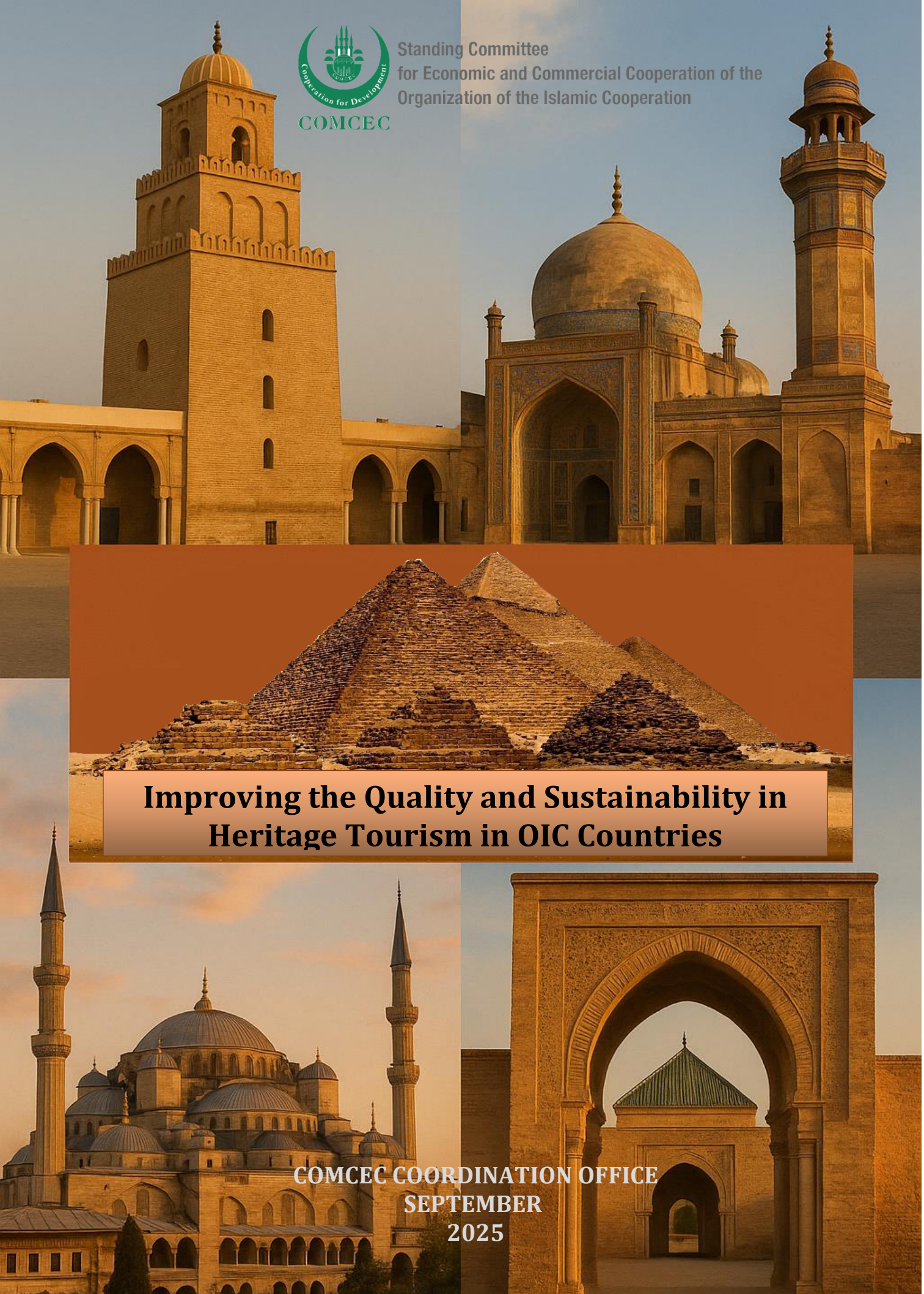

Standing Committee
for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the
Organization of the Islamic Cooperation

COMCEC

Improving the Quality and Sustainability in Heritage Tourism in OIC Countries

COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE
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COMCEC COORDINATION OFFICE

October, 2025

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
3S	*Sea, Sun and Sand*
CAGR	*Compound Annual Growth Rate*
CED	*Environmental Impact Assessments*
COMCEC	*The Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation*
CT&VM	*Cultural Tourism & Visitor Management Framework*
DMOS	*Destination Management Organizations*
EAFLFT	*Egyptian Archives of Folk Life and Folk Traditions*
EIA	*Environmental Impact Assessments*
EIA/SIA	*Environmental and Social Impact Assessments*
ENIT	*Italian National Tourism Board*
ESFT	*Egyptian Society of Folk Traditions*
ETA	*Egyptian Tourist Agency*
GDP	*Gross Domestic Product*
GEM	*Grand Egyptian Museum*
GSTC	*Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria*
ICOMOS	*International Council on Monuments and Sites*
ICTM	*The Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers*
IMARC	*International Market Analysis Research and Consulting Group*
KPIS	*Key Performance Indicators*
KPMG	*Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler*
MIC	*Italian Ministry of Culture*
MICE	*Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions*
MOTA	*Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities*
MSME	*Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises*
NGOS	*Non-Governmental Organizations*
OECD	*Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*
OIC	*Organization of Islamic Cooperation*
PPPS	*Public-Private Partnerships*
PSE	*The Plan Senegal Emergent*
SDGS	*United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*
SESRIC	*Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries*
SHT	*Sustainable Heritage Tourism*
SUS-TAS	*Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale*
T&H	*Tourism & Hospitality*
TGA	*Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency*
TMOCT	*Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism*
TUIK	*Turkish Statistical Institute*
TUREB	*Association of Turkish Tourist Guides*
UNESCO	*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*
UNWTO	*United Nations World Tourism Organization*
VMAST	*Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool*
VMAT	*Visitor Management Assessment Tool*
WCED	*World Commission on Environment and Development*
WHC	*World Heritage Centre*
WTO	*The World Trade Organization*

Executive Summary

Heritage tourism is one of the most dynamic and resilient segments of the global tourism industry and is centred on two key pillars of heritage sources: tangible heritage (e.g. archaeological sites, historic structures, museums, and landscapes) and intangible heritage (e.g. traditions, crafts, gastronomy, and rituals). These assets provide not only attractions but also a direct link between past and present, making them essential for preserving and transmitting cultural identity. It is estimated that more than one-third of international travel is motivated, directly or indirectly, by heritage experiences — whether visiting archaeological sites, exploring historic cities, or engaging with cultural traditions and creative expressions.

Unlike many forms of leisure tourism, heritage tourism is less dependent on seasonal cycles, less vulnerable to sudden shifts in consumer demand, and tends to attract visitors who spend more per trip. The continued global expansion of the middle class, together with shifting preferences toward experiential and transformative travel, especially among Millennials and Generation Z, is driving heritage tourism demand at an unprecedented pace.

For OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) countries, heritage tourism represents both a vast opportunity and a significant responsibility. The OIC region collectively hosts nearly one-fifth of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites, encompassing 187 cultural sites, 35 natural sites, and 9 mixed sites of outstanding universal value. These include some of the world's oldest civilizations, the heartlands of major religions, and unique natural landscapes ranging from deserts and savanas to rainforests. In addition, OIC countries are home to vibrant forms of intangible heritage — music, crafts, rituals, culinary traditions, storytelling, and festivals — which remain underexploited as tourism assets.

This authenticity makes heritage tourism a differentiator that enhances competitiveness, fosters national pride, and contributes to sustainable development. By strategically investing in heritage, OIC countries can diversify their economies, generate more inclusive benefits for communities, and position themselves as leaders in sustainable tourism. Doing so requires not only safeguarding heritage but also increasing its visibility through stronger recognition and branding strategies, ensuring that both iconic and lesser-known sites are legible and attractive to international markets.

For decades, tourism development strategies in many OIC countries have been dominated by mass tourism, particularly the "sunlust" model focused on sea, sand, and sun. Resorts along the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Gulf have attracted millions of visitors, largely motivated by these leisure products. This approach has delivered rapid growth in arrivals and revenues, yet it has also revealed structural weaknesses. Sunlust tourism is highly seasonal, producing sharp fluctuations in jobs and income. It is also intensely competitive: beaches and warm weather are abundant across the globe, which forces destinations into price competition. Tourists in this segment are among the most price-sensitive, often selecting packages based on airfare discounts or hotel promotions. This model also drives homogenization and commodification: standardized resort formats, imported entertainment, and menus adapted to international tastes flatten distinctions of place and push destinations into price competition.

This dependence on price-sensitive markets has contributed to a structural weakness in OIC tourism: the average tourist spending in OIC countries (811 USD pre-pandemic year-in 2019) remains historically well below the world average (1085 USD pre-pandemic year-2019). In many destinations, despite significant increases in visitor numbers, per capita revenues have stagnated because mass-market beach holiday packages generate volume but not value. The

leakage stemming from large tour oprators dominating the mass tourism market, charter airlines and international chain resorts also decreases the revenues received from beach tourism. This reduces the resources available for reinvestment in infrastructure, conservation, and community benefits, while making the sector more vulnerable to crises.

Heritage tourism on the other hand offers an alternative pathway that is more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. Visitors motivated by cultural and historical experiences are less price-sensitive and more inclined to seek authenticity and depth. They stay longer, spend more per trip, and purchase a wider range of services — from guided tours and performances to handicrafts and local gastronomy. Instead of concentrating expenditure in large resorts owned by international chains, heritage tourists tend to distribute their spending more widely across boutique hotels, local businesses, and communities. This generates stronger economic linkages, reduces leakage, and creates more inclusive opportunities for local small-scale entrepreneurs. By emphasizing their distinctive cultural and historical assets, OIC countries can break free from the low-value competition that characterizes much of sunlust tourism and reposition themselves as heritage destinations offering experiences that are meaningful, immersive, and irreplaceable.

Moreover, heritage should not be viewed only as a stand-alone product, but also as a supporting dimension that enhances other forms of tourism. Business travelers can add cultural tours and culinary experiences to their itineraries, creating added value for the destination. Even tourists who initially come for beaches and leisure can be encouraged to participate in heritage excursions, spreading demand beyond coastal resorts and easing pressure on fragile ecosystems. In this way, heritage tourism acts both as a driver in its own right and as a multiplier that elevates the value of other tourism segments.

For OIC countries, this dual role makes heritage tourism a strategic priority. By repositioning heritage not only as a distinctive product but also as a complementary asset that enriches business, and leisure tourism, OIC destinations can diversify their offerings, extend visitor stays, and increase average spending. More importantly, they can build a tourism model that is resilient to crises, rooted in cultural pride, and aligned with long-term sustainable development goals.

Heritage tourism stands out as a sector uniquely aligned with the principles of sustainability. As underscored by UNWTO's Manila Declaration and UNEP/UNWTO frameworks, responsible heritage tourism must balance cultural and natural preservation. While mass tourism often generates quick revenue at the cost of environmental degradation, social disruption, and economic leakage, heritage tourism offers a framework that integrates conservation, cultural continuity, and inclusive growth. Its contribution to sustainable development can be understood across three interconnected dimensions: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. These three pillars are not abstract ideals but living processes: they depend on how well societies mobilize heritage to connect past and present, and crucially, how effectively knowledge and values are transmitted to new generations.

Heritage tourism promotes the conservation of both cultural and natural assets. Unlike large-scale resort development, which often requires extensive land clearance, resource-intensive infrastructure, and heavy use of water and energy, heritage tourism is centered on the adaptive reuse and careful management of existing sites. Historic mosques, palaces, traditional villages, and archaeological remains become not only cultural touchstones but also tourism assets whose preservation is directly tied to economic value.

This link between conservation and tourism provides strong incentives for safeguarding fragile sites. By embedding conservation within economic activity, heritage tourism provides a model for balancing environmental protection with development. Visitor management systems, carrying capacity regulations, and investment in conservation infrastructure are critical tools to ensure that increased demand does not threaten the very resources that attract visitors. Climate change adds further urgency: many heritage sites face risks from desertification, rising sea levels, or extreme weather events.

At its core, heritage tourism is about cultural continuity and the transmission of knowledge across generations. In many OIC countries, younger people show declining interest in heritage careers and crafts, as globalized culture shifts aspirations toward standardized forms of consumption. Heritage tourism provides a platform to reverse this trend by making traditional practices visible, valued, and economically viable. Unlike mass tourism, which can erode traditions through homogenization and commercialization, heritage tourism strengthens identity and pride by rewarding authenticity. When cultural expressions — from music and crafts to rituals and gastronomy — are recognized as assets, communities gain both recognition and incentives to safeguard them.

Heritage tourism also fosters intercultural dialogue as well. Visitors are not merely passive consumers; they engage in learning, exchange, and appreciation of different ways of life. This encounter builds bridges of understanding, particularly significant in OIC countries whose heritage reflects centuries of interaction among diverse civilizations. By promoting respect and awareness, heritage tourism contributes to social cohesion both within communities and between cultures.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for heritage tourism in OIC countries lies in its economic contribution. Unlike sunlust tourists, heritage tourists are motivated by authenticity and are willing to spend more on experiences that connect them to history and culture. This translates into longer stays, higher per capita spending, and more diversified patterns of expenditure. Crucially, heritage tourism generates local linkages, creating opportunities for small enterprises and reducing economic leakage.

Economically, heritage tourism also contributes to resilience. Because it is less seasonal, it provides a more stable flow of income. Because it values uniqueness, it reduces dependency on price competition. And because it generates diverse local linkages, it spreads benefits more equitably. For OIC countries that currently record average tourist spending well below the global average, heritage tourism offers a pathway to upgrade the value proposition of tourism sector, ensuring that growth translates into genuine development rather than low-value, high-volume dependency.

This analytical study sought to analyze the role of heritage tourism in OIC countries, identify key challenges and opportunities, and develop policy recommendations that align with principles of sustainability and competitiveness. To achieve these objectives, a mixed-method approach was adopted. An extensive literature review of academic research, government strategies, and reports by UNESCO, UNWTO, and ICOMOS established a global benchmark for heritage tourism management and sustainability frameworks. This was followed by twenty in-depth interviews with stakeholders. These interviews provided qualitative insights into governance challenges, funding mechanisms, and community engagement practices. A structured survey of 130 stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, tourism boards, and private sector professionals, generated quantitative data on perceptions of the sector's strengths, weaknesses, sustainability and priorities for investment.

Deeper perspectives were captured and validated through two focus groups held in Indonesia and Senegal. Finally, five case study countries were selected to illustrate a spectrum of experiences and benchmark strategies for the rest of the OIC destinations. By combining literature reviews, interviews, surveys, focus groups, and case studies, the methodology ensured both breadth and depth. This triangulation of evidence allowed the study to go beyond description, producing a nuanced understanding of what enables heritage tourism to thrive, what undermines it, and how OIC countries can move forward with strategies that are sustainable, context-sensitive, inclusive, and future-oriented.

Because heritage tourism in OIC countries is not a uniform experience, each country combines unique cultural, historical, and natural assets with different governance models, funding approaches, and levels of international visibility. To understand this diversity and to highlight lessons that can inform policy, five case studies were selected for detailed analysis: Türkiye and Egypt as long-established heritage tourism leaders in the OIC; Indonesia and Senegal as emerging destinations that showcase the potential of community-based and intangible heritage models; and Italy, a non-OIC comparator, was included because of its global reputation for heritage tourism and the management lessons it offers. Together, these case studies illustrate both the opportunities and the challenges of developing heritage tourism that is sustainable, inclusive, and competitive.

Türkiye is among the OIC's most prominent heritage tourism destinations. Its geographical position as a bridge between Europe and Asia and its history as the cradle of multiple civilizations have endowed the country with a remarkable variety of assets. Over the past two decades, Türkiye has strategically invested in heritage tourism. The "Go Türkiye" campaign integrates archaeological sites, gastronomy, festivals, and creative industries into a single national brand. Major infrastructural upgrades in historic cities, new museums, and the promotion of thematic routes and faith-based circuits have strengthened its appeal. These measures have made Türkiye one of the top ten global tourism destinations in terms of arrivals. Türkiye's success has also been linked to aggressive digital marketing, including international fairs, social media campaigns, and influencer partnerships, which have increased global visibility for heritage tourism.

Challenges remain, however. Overtourism in sites such as Cappadocia, Pamukkale, and Istanbul's historic peninsula threatens both the preservation of heritage and the quality of visitor experiences. Many rural heritage assets are attracting far fewer resources than flagship sites. Environmental risks, from earthquakes to wildfires, also create vulnerabilities. Türkiye's experience highlights both the potential of heritage tourism to drive global competitiveness and the need for careful visitor management and regional diversification.

Egypt is one of the world's most iconic heritage tourism destinations. The pyramids of Giza, the temples of Luxor, the Valley of the Kings, and the Nile River remain among the most recognizable symbols of human civilization. Egypt has invested heavily in heritage promotion, with the forthcoming Grand Egyptian Museum expected to become a global attraction. Smaller site museums and interpretation centers in Aswan and Luxor also show promising efforts to distribute demand and improve visitor experiences.

Despite its extraordinary heritage, Egypt faces persistent challenges. Conservation efforts are undermined by limited funding and environmental risks, including rising temperatures that accelerate the degradation of stone monuments. The illicit trade in antiquities remains a significant problem. Community involvement in tourism development has been limited, with benefits often captured by central authorities or large operators. This lack of local ownership reduces incentives for heritage protection.

Yet Egypt illustrates the potential of large-scale heritage investments to enhance international visibility. It also demonstrates the importance of coupling global branding with local engagement. Without stronger participation of communities, the economic and cultural benefits of heritage tourism will remain unevenly distributed. Hence there is a need to faciliatate local awareness and community involvement.

Italy was included in the report as a non-OIC benchmark because it represents one of the world's most successful heritage tourism destinations. With 60 UNESCO World Heritage Sites — the largest number in the world — Italy can be considered as the center of heritage tourism. Italy's governance frameworks, supported by EU standards, ensure a high level of heritage protection. The use of quota systems, online reservations, and differential pricing strategies has helped manage overtourism in Venice and Florence.

Italy also highlights the risks of success. Overtourism in major cities has led to gentrification, the displacement of residents, and pressures on infrastructure. Balancing conservation with tourism demand remains a constant challenge. For OIC countries, Italy offers valuable lessons in heritage governance, diversification, and the integration of intangible assets into broader cultural industries.

Indonesia demonstrates the potential of community-based heritage tourism in the OIC context. The country hosts ten UNESCO sites, including the Borobudur and Prambanan temples, as well as diverse intangible heritage such as batik, gamelan music, and traditional rituals. In Bali, villages such as Penglipuran have become models of how communities can manage tourism collectively, ensuring equitable benefit-sharing, environmental stewardship, and the preservation of traditions. Heritage tourism in Indonesia has increasingly been linked to the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet the country faces significant challenges: climate change, weak enforcement, limited funding, and illegal construction around heritage zones threaten the sustainability of tourism. Coordination between central and local governments is often inconsistent, leading to fragmented management.

A parallel priority is investing in guides, artisans, and cultural entrepreneurs through apprenticeships and vocational programs that attract younger generations into heritage careers. Nonetheless, Indonesia illustrates how intangible heritage can be mobilized to strengthen national identity and attract international visitors. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of community-based approaches and local involvement which could serve as a model for other OIC countries.

Senegal as the final OIC case country represents the growing importance of intangible heritage within the OIC. While Gorée Island and the colonial architecture of Saint-Louis are UNESCO-listed, it is Senegal's music, festivals, and living traditions that increasingly define its heritage tourism appeal. The Dakar Biennale and international music festivals have become major attractions, drawing visitors from across Africa and beyond.

However, Senegal faces significant constraints. Infrastructure weaknesses, limited conservation funding, and inadequate international marketing reduce its visibility. While intangible heritage is a major strength, stronger linkages with international markets are needed to unlock its potential. Senegal's experience underscores the importance of integrating intangible heritage into tourism strategies, while also investing in infrastructure and global branding. Stakeholders also highlighted the need to expand digital promotion and influencer-supported campaigns to raise the international profile of Senegal's heritage, particularly beyond festivals.

Taken together, these case studies highlight the diversity of heritage tourism experiences across OIC countries. Türkiye and Egypt show the power and challenges of established heritage

destinations, with lessons in branding, investment, and visitor management. Indonesia and Senegal illustrate the value of community participation and intangible heritage, while Italy provides benchmarks in governance, diversification, funding and overtourism management. Across all cases, the common thread is that heritage tourism can drive competitiveness, but its sustainability depends on strong governance, adequate funding, and inclusive community engagement. The diversity of experiences confirms that while each country's heritage is unique, the structural issues shaping heritage tourism in the OIC are often shared.

The most significant strength of OIC countries is the sheer abundance and diversity of their heritage resources. Collectively, they hold nearly one-fifth of all UNESCO World Heritage Sites, encompassing globally significant monuments, archaeological complexes, sacred sites, and natural landscapes. This is complemented by intangible heritage of equal richness that are integral to cultural identity. Unlike mass tourism products that can be replicated elsewhere, these heritage assets are unique to their places of origin and thus form a powerful competitive advantage.

Another strength is the deep-rooted tradition of hospitality that characterizes societies across the OIC. Visitors often remark on the warmth, generosity, and cultural pride of local communities. This intangible quality, when linked with tangible heritage, creates memorable experiences that combine both place and people. Moreover, heritage in many OIC countries is living rather than static. Rituals, music, crafts, and festivals continue to be practiced as part of daily life, ensuring that visitors encounter dynamic cultural expressions rather than staged performances. This authenticity is increasingly valued by travelers worldwide, especially younger generations seeking meaningful, immersive experiences.

Despite the wealth of assets, OIC countries face persistent weaknesses that constrain the full development of heritage tourism. Governance and institutional fragmentation is the most significant: responsibility for heritage is often split across ministries and agencies with overlapping or unclear mandates (e.g., culture overseeing archaeological protection while tourism manages visitor infrastructure), leading to inefficiencies, gaps in enforcement, conflicting policies, and weak coordination. This undermines the capacity to respond to overtourism, illicit trafficking, and climate risks.

A second cross-cutting weakness is chronic underfunding of conservation. Many sites rely on state budgets that are inadequate and vulnerable to political cycles; donor or sponsorship funding helps but is rarely sufficient or sustainable. Even where flagship investments (e.g., the Grand Egyptian Museum, Türkiye's Troy Museum) attract resources, thousands of smaller sites remain under-maintained. Without reliable financing—such as heritage funds, earmarked taxes, entry fees, tourism levies, or public-private partnerships—conservation will remain uneven and inadequate.

Community engagement is also limited. Local residents frequently have little say in how heritage is managed and receive few direct benefits from tourism revenues, which reduces support for conservation and can create tensions with visitors. At the same time, infrastructure gaps—especially in rural and inland areas—limit accessibility and visitor satisfaction (poor transport links, limited accommodation, inadequate facilities). This concentrates flows in a few accessible sites, exacerbating overtourism and leaving other regions underutilized. Finally, branding and narrative consistency is uneven: while iconic sites enjoy international visibility, smaller yet valuable assets remain under-promoted and disconnected from national storytelling—further preventing OIC countries from leveraging their full heritage potential.

Despite these weaknesses, OIC countries are well positioned to seize opportunities in the global tourism market. The most important is the growing demand for authentic cultural experiences. Research show that international travelers, especially millennials and Generation Z, increasingly prioritize meaningful and immersive experiences over generic leisure products. This shift in demand aligns perfectly with the strengths of OIC countries, where authenticity and cultural richness are abundant. By repositioning their tourism industries around heritage, OIC destinations can tap into higher-value markets and increase per capita spending, which currently lags behind global averages.

Digital transformation offers another opportunity. New technologies, artificial intelligence, photo captures, drones, satelites, online tools, digital twins, booking systems, virtual-augmented reality interpretation, and smart visitor management, can enhance the quality of visitor experiences while protecting fragile heritage assets. Virtual museums and digital storytelling can expand access to heritage, attract new audiences, and generate revenue streams beyond physical visits while decreasing the duration of visits.

Regional and cross-border cooperation also present important opportunities. Many OIC countries share cultural and historical linkages that could be developed into joint heritage corridors. Such initiatives could attract long-haul travelers seeking multi-country itineraries while strengthening regional identity and solidarity. Moreover, collaboration within the OIC framework could facilitate joint promotion, shared training programs, and coordinated funding mechanisms.

Finally, innovative financing models are emerging worldwide that could be adapted in OIC contexts. Heritage trust funds, entry levies dedicated to conservation, and partnerships with private investors can provide stable, long-term resources for site management. By adopting such models, OIC countries could overcome chronic underfunding and secure the future of their heritage assets.

While opportunities are significant, threats to heritage tourism in OIC countries are equally pressing. Climate change poses existential risks to both natural and cultural heritage. Rising sea levels threaten coastal sites, desertification endangers oases and traditional agricultural landscapes, and extreme weather events damage fragile monuments and natural heritage. Without proactive adaptation measures, many irreplaceable assets could be lost.

Overtourism is another major threat. Left unmanaged, overtourism can erode the very qualities that make heritage attractive, leading to a cycle of declining visitor satisfaction and site degradation. A deeper, long-term threat is youth disengagement from heritage careers and traditions. Globalized lifestyles and limited economic incentives deter younger generations from roles as artisans, guides, or conservators, threatening intergenerational continuity.

Illicit trade in antiquities remains a persistent problem, particularly in conflict-affected regions. Looting and trafficking deprive countries of valuable cultural assets and undermine heritage integrity. At the same time, urbanization pressures — particularly unregulated development near heritage zones — threaten authenticity and visual integrity. Historic urban quarters and traditional architectures across North Africa and the Middle East have been altered by inappropriate construction, mining projects and agricultural expansion weakening their tourism potential.

Finally, commercialization and cultural erosion represent subtler but equally significant threats. When heritage is commodified purely as entertainment for tourists, it risks losing authenticity and meaning for local communities. This can undermine the very cultural foundations on which heritage tourism depends. The challenge for OIC countries will be to balance tourism

development with cultural preservation, ensuring that heritage remains a living expression of identity rather than a hollow staged performance for tourists.

The cross-country analysis shows that OIC countries have immense heritage wealth that could transform their tourism sectors. Strengths in authenticity and cultural diversity are undeniable, but weaknesses in governance, funding, and community engagement hold back progress. Opportunities in global demand, digital technology, and regional cooperation are promising, yet threats from climate change, overtourism, and illicit trade are serious. The task ahead is to leverage strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and mitigating threats through effective governance, sustainable financing, and inclusive policies. The following recommendations outline the priority areas for action.

Strengthening Governance: The first priority is to *strengthen governance* structures for heritage tourism. In many OIC countries, responsibility for heritage is fragmented across ministries of culture, tourism, environment, urban planning, local authorities and so on. This leads to duplication, inefficiency, and sometimes contradictory policies. A clear institutional framework is essential, with a lead agency mandated to coordinate heritage management across sectors. Legal frameworks should be updated to meet international standards, ensuring the protection of sites against illicit trade, inappropriate development, and environmental damage. For OIC countries, adopting transparent governance models, clarifying institutional responsibilities, and investing in enforcement capacity are critical first steps. Effective heritage tourism governance also requires robust systems of monitoring and evaluation. Indicators should measure not only tourist arrivals, and visitor impacts but also conservation outcomes, employment generation, and cultural vitality. Monitoring should also feed into adaptive management, allowing authorities to refine policies as conditions change. Governance reform should also integrate branding and recognition responsibilities. Culture and tourism agencies must work together to ensure that heritage assets are not only protected but also properly acknowledged, narrated, packaged consistently, and made visible to global audiences.

Ensuring Sustainable Funding: Without adequate funding, heritage tourism cannot be sustainable. Most OIC countries rely heavily on state budgets that are often insufficient and subject to political cycles. Considering the amount of heritage assets to be preserved, sustainable financing requires the creation of dedicated heritage funds supported by multiple revenue streams. Tourism levies, entry fees, and earmarked taxes can provide predictable resources, while public-private partnerships can mobilize investment for site development, conservation, and interpretation. Innovative approaches, such as endowment funds or corporate sponsorships, should also be explored. By establishing financial mechanisms that are ring-fenced and transparent, OIC countries can ensure that heritage conservation is not sacrificed during economic downturns. Funding strategies must not only cover conservation and infrastructure but also invest in interpretation, marketing, and brand-building, since recognition is essential for converting heritage into tourism value and finances.

Empowering Communities: Communities are the custodians of heritage, yet in many OIC countries, they remain marginal to tourism sytem, decision-making processes and benefit-sharing. Empowering communities requires a shift from top-down management to participatory governance. Local residents should have a voice in planning and managing heritage sites, and a share of tourism revenues should be reinvested in community development. Policy makers should therefore institutionalize benefit-sharing mechanisms, promote local ownership of tourism enterprises, and expand training and employment opportunities for communities living near heritage sites. Capacity-building and awareness programs can strengthen local skills,

support entrepreneurs, and reinforce intergenerational knowledge transfer, ensuring that heritage remains lived rather than staged.

Diversifying Tourism Products: Heritage tourism should not be confined to landmark monuments and museums. Diversification is essential to capture the full value of cultural assets and reduce pressure on over-visited sites. Intangible heritage — including music, crafts, cuisine, festivals, and storytelling — offers immense potential for product innovation in OIC. Developing thematic routes — such as faith-based itineraries, Silk Road trails, or maritime heritage circuits — can also distribute demand and attract new market segments. Diversification also relies on branding: thematic routes, gastronomy circuits, and intangible heritage experiences need coherent storytelling and strong digital visibility if they are to compete in global markets. Recognition through UNESCO listings, Michelin guides, cittalow, creative city and so on labels should be integrated into national branding strategies. Digital platforms can enhance interpretation through augmented reality, virtual tours, and multimedia storytelling, making heritage more engaging for younger audiences. Social media and digital marketing expand global reach, particularly for intangible heritage products like crafts and music.

Visitor Management and Building Resilience: Heritage sites are increasingly vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters, and the pressures of overtourism. Building resilience must therefore be at the core of heritage tourism policies. This includes investing in disaster preparedness, developing climate adaptation strategies, and introducing visitor management systems to control flows. Carrying capacity assessments, quota systems, dynamic pricing, and online booking tools can prevent overcrowding and ensure that tourism remains compatible with conservation while improving visitor experiences. Integrating heritage tourism into broader climate and disaster management strategies will be critical to safeguarding assets for future generations. Resilience is not only environmental but also social. A heritage sector that fails to engage younger generations or provide livelihoods for local custodians risks cultural erosion. Building resilience must therefore include social safeguards, youth training, and cultural continuity mechanisms.

Strengthening Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation: Many OIC countries share cultural and historical linkages that could form the basis of regional heritage corridors. Joint branding campaigns under the OIC umbrella could raise global visibility, while shared training and funding initiatives could pool resources and expertise. International organizations and networks such as UNESCO, Cittaslow, Creative Cities and so on would also help preserve and promote heritage. OIC countries could benefit from adopting similar approaches within their own framework. Joint branding campaigns under the OIC umbrella would amplify recognition, while cross-border digital platforms could raise the profile of lesser-known sites and create multi-country itineraries appealing to long-haul markets. A shared digital platform to register manage and promote tangible and intangible heritage in OIC and collective virtual exhibitions would also be other collaborative efforts.

These recommendations are interdependent pillars of a sustainable strategy. Governance and funding provide the institutional and financial foundations. Community empowerment and youth engagement ensure social continuity and inclusivity. Diversification and branding expand markets and raise visitor value. Resilience and regional cooperation safeguard heritage against climate and overtourism while positioning OIC collectively in global tourism. Together, these measures can transform heritage tourism from an overlooked asset into a recognized and resilient engine of sustainable development.

The roadmap for OIC countries can also be approached in three stages. Minimum standards focus on legal frameworks, site protection, community empowerment, and basic infrastructure.

Good practices involve integrated management plans, product diversification, sustainable marketing, and financing models. Innovation and growth expand on these with smart technologies (AI-driven monitoring, VR/AR interpretation), heritage corridors, and advanced digital branding. This staged approach allows OIC countries to consolidate foundations before moving into global competitiveness.

Introduction

Comprising 57 member states on four continents, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) distinguishes itself with varied cultural, natural, traditional, heritage, and tourism attractions. OIC nations hosted 233 million international travelers in 2023, which raised their share of global traveler arrivals from 13% in 2019 to 18% while their tourism revenues grew from $238 billion to $250 billion, increasing their global share from roughly 14% to 17% over the same period (COMCEC, 2024; SESRIC, 2024).

Global traveler motivations can be broadly categorized into two main categories: leisure tourists and business travelers. The share of business travel, including business meetings, incentives, conventions, and events (MICE), is shrinking mainly due to the widespread adoption of digital tools, particularly after the Covid-19 pandemic, and currently stands atCovid-19 pandemic, and currently stands at wide adoption particularly after Covid-19 and currently 14% (Bileu, 2025). Most tourists visiting OIC destinations are also leisure tourists. In addition, leisure tourists are usually grouped under sunlust and wanderlust travelers (see Figure 1). Sunlust tourists are also referred to as 3S tourists, addressing their motivations for 3S tourism.

Wanderlust tourists, however, are usually attracted by the unique heritage of a destination. The concept of "wanderlust" describes a strong desire to travel and explore unfamiliar places and cultures. This intrinsic motivation aligns closely with heritage tourism, where individuals seek to engage deeply with the cultural and historical aspects of destinations. Because they value the local cultural assets, these heritage tourists are more likely to respect the local culture and value their interactions with hosts. As most cultural assets are unique to the destination, heritage tourists are also less price sensitive, and they are willing to pay more compared to sun-lust tourists. The 3S destinations have various substitutes, hence the sunlust tourists have a large variety of alternatives and a higher price elasticity.

Figure 1. Travel Motivation

Source : (Leiper et al., 2008)

Heritage tourism, which served primarily only wealthy travelers and scholars during the early twentieth century, was democratized and became the main motivation for a wider traveler market and also led to its widespread growth (Richards, 2018), currently accounting for around 36% of the tourism volume (UNWTO, 2018). This growth is driven by increasing interest in cultural and natural heritage, arts, and local traditions, with travelers seeking experiences such as visits to historical and natural sites, participation in cultural festivals, and engagement with local communities and cultures. The expansion of the middle class in emerging economies and the rise of experiential travel have further contributed to this upward trend.

Hence, heritage tourism is ideal for encouraging cultural and environmental preservation, sustainable income, and more meaningful tourist-host interaction. This strategy supports the local economy and inspires people to value their history, nature and traditions with a sense of pride. Moreover, heritage tourism may produce more respectful and enjoyable experiences for everyone concerned by promoting a closer link between tourists and the local culture (Pai et al., 2025).

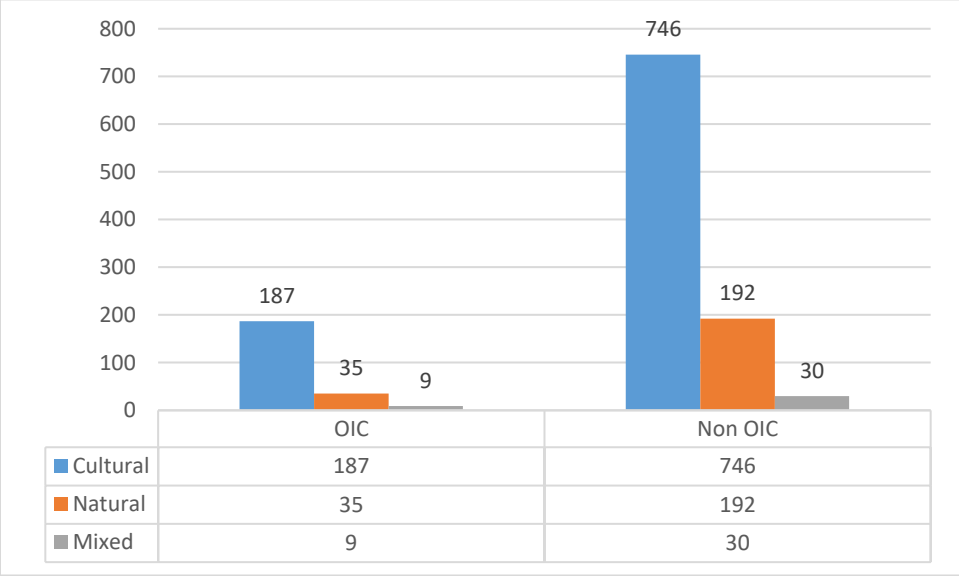
Heritage tourism focuses on history, culture, and traditions, appealing to tourists higher order needs, seeking educational self-improvement and cultural enrichment (Peloi, 2024), whereas 3S tourism promotes enjoyment and relaxation, attracting masses to seaside locations for vacations (Alipour et al., 2020). Heritage tourism can also serve as a supporting product for other tourism motivations. For example, MICE travelers or sunlust tourists are also motivated to experience local heritage resources during their travels.

3S tourism has several negative impacts, particularly on the environment and local communities. Often associated with mass tourism, this leads to environmental degradation due to overuse and inadequate infrastructure. It causes overcrowding, putting pressure on natural resources and transportation systems (Taiminen, 2018). Additionally, the prevalence of 3S tourism can lead to the commercialization of authentic traditions, causing cultural erosion. Moreover, sunlust tourism tends to be highly seasonal which results in unstable employment structures and fluctuating income for locals (Gustafson, 2002). Furthermore, overdevelopment of facilities can also destroy natural landscapes, reducing the long-term ecological and aesthetic value of the area (Monioudi & Velegrakis, 2022). Hence, overall heritage tourism is more sustainable than mass tourism and deserves a particular focus.

Heritage tourism resources can also be grouped into tangible and intangible heritage assets, addressing diverse elements of cultural identity, nature, and history. Tangible heritage assets include physical sites such as archaeological landmarks, historical buildings, monuments, museums, sacred locations, religious sites and national parks that attract tourists seeking direct experiences with historical and natural environments. In contrast, intangible heritage encompasses cultural expressions and living traditions, including local cuisine, traditional arts and crafts, folklore, music, dances, spiritual ceremonies, festivals, storytelling, and various community rituals (UNESCO, 2024a). Both categories enrich heritage visitor experiences, contribute to destination attractiveness, foster cultural understanding, and support sustainable local economies by highlighting shared cultural narratives and community practices.

Considering both tangible and intangible cultural resources, OIC nations have considerable growth potential for heritage tourism. They possess a competitive advantage over non-OIC tourism destinations. Of the 1,199 UNESCO World Heritage sites documented from 1978 to 2023, approximately 231 (19%) were located in OIC destinations. Among them, 187 are classified as cultural heritage sites, 35 are natural heritage sites, and nine are hybrids of both categories (UNESCO, 2024a). Figure 2 compares the number of World Heritage Sites between the OIC and non-OIC countries.

Figure 2. World Heritage Sites (Numbers)



Source: (SESRIC, 2024)

Supported by its natural wonders, ancient civilizations, cultures, and religions, the OIC members have various authentic tourism resources, which range from rich cultural heritage to natural resources. The current heritage tourism literature highlights that authenticity strongly influences tourist satisfaction and loyalty to heritage tourism attractions, leading to increased intention to revisit (Park et al., 2019). Hence, OIC destinations providing various authentic heritage are able to create satisfied tourists, who are not only willing to return to the destination but also produce positive word of mouth recommending the destination to others. Considering tourism's multiplier impact and contribution to foreign exchange, employment, and tax revenues, heritage tourism is potentially a key driver of economic growth in OIC countries, with UNESCO-listed sites and historic landmarks attracting global travelers. Improving visitor experience in heritage tourism and strengthening conservation initiatives help to increase the competitiveness of OIC tourism even further (Uula et al., 2023).

Many OIC destinations' heritage also involves significant places of worship and rituals. For cultural enrichment, even non-pilgrims travel to these faith-based destinations. Ultimately, pilgrimage remains a significant aspect of heritage tourism, attracting millions of visitors to faith-based destinations in the OIC, especially given both Muslims and non-Muslims' growing interest in exploring Islamic history, which drives travel to discover Islamic heritage (Alrawadieh, 2024). Cultural heritage tourism can offer multiple meanings depending on the combination of tangible and intangible unique experiences promoting cultural values and new travel routes (COMCEC, 2016). Nevertheless, OIC countries' heritage tourism potential is currently limited by various challenges in infrastructure, sustainability, marketing, and financial issues (Alrawadieh, 2024).

Many OIC countries are home to significant UNESCO World Heritage sites, presenting considerable potential for developing heritage tourism. Nevertheless, their relatively limited share in global heritage tourism revenues underscores the need for targeted strategic actions to enhance sustainability and improve the quality of heritage tourism offerings (Roknoddin Eftekhari et al., 2009). While heritage tourism fosters cultural exchange and facilitates local

economic development, several critical challenges hinder its sustainability. These include issues related to the planning, management, governance, and branding of heritage sites (Cheng & Jimenez, 2024), as well as problems arising from exceeding carrying capacities, resulting in overtourism and environmental degradation.

Additionally, the impacts of climate change threaten the preservation of sensitive heritage locations through rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and changing environmental conditions. Commercialization pressures also risk diluting the authenticity and integrity of cultural expressions, turning heritage into market-driven commodities rather than respected cultural values. Furthermore, heritage tourism can contribute to gentrification, causing displacement of local communities and altering their social fabric, identity, and traditional ways of life (Gotham, 2005). Wars, pollution, wildfires, floods, and other natural events also affect the sustainability of these resources. Addressing these multifaceted issues requires comprehensive policies, proactive governance, and community-oriented approaches to ensure the long-term viability and responsible management of heritage tourism resources.

Sustainability is the practice of meeting present-day needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). This concept is especially critical for heritage resources, given the ethical obligation to preserve cultural and natural heritage so future generations can experience and learn from them. Sustainable tourism can be defined as tourism that comprehensively considers and manages its current and future economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts, ensuring it addresses the needs of visitors, the tourism industry, the environment, and host communities alike (UNWTO, 2023a). It rests upon three essential pillars: economic sustainability, involving equitable economic benefits for communities; environmental sustainability, concerning the protection and responsible use of natural resources; and socio-cultural sustainability, which emphasizes preserving cultural heritage, identity, and diversity (UNESCO, 2022).

Sustainability in heritage tourism can also be examined through the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including residents, the tourism industry, and tourists themselves. Although these groups may have conflicting interests—for example, tourists often seek unrestricted access, whereas local communities may advocate for restrictions to protect cultural integrity—all stakeholders ultimately depend upon the sustainable management of heritage resources for their long-term viability. Considering that heritage tourists value the heritage assets they visit, maintaining the authenticity, integrity, and quality of these sites benefits the local tourism industry and residents by enhancing the destination's brand and economic viability (Richards, 2006). Thus, governments play a crucial role in balancing these varied interests, prioritizing sustainable strategies that safeguard heritage assets for long-term social, cultural, economic, and environmental benefits.

Developing sustainable heritage tourism is possible with developing structural policies, strengthening regional collaboration, improving visitor experience, and facilitating equitable tourism development across regions (Alrawadieh, 2024; Dabour, 2003). The OIC provides great prospects for heritage tourists with its various rich cultural, historical, and natural resources. Apart from its intangible heritage, which includes arts, crafts, rituals, traditions, festivals, ceremonies, gastronomy, and so on, OIC destinations offer various tangible historical (i.e., Pyramids) and religious (i.e., Makkah al-Mukarramah) monuments, and natural wonders (i.e., Sahara, Nile, Pamukkale, Sine-Saloum) which already attract millions of travelers each year. OIC nations can therefore effectively accomplish sustainable heritage tourism growth while protecting their cultural heritage (SESRIC, 2017) when they establish structures, governance,

and marketing strategies addressing a planned approach to sustainable heritage tourism management.

Thus, this report aims to investigate and offer ways to improve the quality and the sustainability of heritage tourism in OIC member countries. It examines the social, economic, and environmental challenges heritage tourism faces and provides policy recommendations for improved quality by looking at benchmark case destinations, best practices, input from tourism experts, and secondary data. In this regard, Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, Senegal, and Italy were identified as the case destinations for benchmark, which hold significant cultural, historic, and natural heritage resources, making them important destinations in heritage tourism. By addressing the quality and sustainability of heritage tourism, this report aims to serve as a guideline and to provide OIC member states with the tools and insights necessary to harness the full potential of heritage tourism, while ensuring that its benefits contribute to economic development, social well-being, and environmental sustainability.

1. Conceptual Framework – Heritage Tourism

1.1. Definition and Importance of Heritage Tourism

Heritage is a unique tourism resource, which can define a destination (Ma et al., 2020) and is described as *"an inheritance from the past that is valued in the present and is hoped to be passed on to future generations"* (Timothy, 2015). Whether tangible or intangible, abstract or concrete, natural or cultural, ancient or somewhat modern, heritage can take a variety of shapes. Although certain elements of patrimony might appear normal, the remarkable authenticity of heritage usually generates curiosity among particularly strangers such as tourists. Therefore, depending on the exploitation of historical resources, heritage tourism is an essential component of the tourism industry in many destinations worldwide, attracting millions of tourists. In many communities, heritage can also play a significant role in defining identity and local pride. Understanding the past can assist in managing current and future challenges (UNESCO, 2013a).

According to a previous COMCEC (2023) report, OIC countries offer diverse tourism products encompassing rich cultural traditions, religious heritage, historical landmarks, and natural attractions. Tourism has also emerged in the twenty-first century as an effective tool for heritage construction, facilitating the creation and reinterpretation of heritage in an era characterized by increased mobility (Gravari-Barbas, 2018). Consequently, heritage tourism has become an area of growing interest for OIC member states, emphasizing the authentic cultural, historical, and religious significance of their sites.

Heritage tourism, often interchangeably referred to as cultural tourism, involves traveling to explore authentic experiences connected to the cultural, historical, and natural heritage of a specific region or community. It is an integral component of the broader tourism system, serving to deepen cultural exchange, promote economic growth, and support heritage conservation efforts. Heritage tourism encompasses various specialized themes, such as faith tourism—visiting sacred sites, pilgrimage routes, and religious monuments; gastronomy tourism—exploring local cuisines, culinary traditions, food festivals, and markets; historical tourism—engaging with historic landmarks, archaeological sites, museums, and monuments; and festival tourism—participating in traditional celebrations, cultural events, and artistic performances, and so on. Each of these thematic categories contributes uniquely to visitor experiences, highlighting local identity and diversity, fostering community pride, and stimulating sustainable economic benefits (Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Richards, 2006).

Heritage tourists can be defined as tourists motivated to see and experience local cultural heritage resources in the destination. A study by Nguyen and Cheung (2014) affirms that heritage tourism attracts five primary types of travelers, including sightseeing, purposeful, casual, incidental, and serendipitous, with no notable variation in socio-demographic profile between them and ordinary tourists. The purposeful cultural tourist (high centrality/deep experience) travels primarily to learn about another culture or heritage; this is the main reason for their visit, and they actively seek deep, meaningful engagement. The sightseeing cultural tourist (high centrality/shallow experience) is also motivated by culture, but prefers a more superficial, entertainment-oriented experience rather than in-depth exploration. The casual cultural tourist (modest centrality/shallow experience) includes cultural elements in their trip, but these are not central to their decision to visit a destination. The incidental cultural tourist (low centrality/shallow experience) does not travel with cultural purposes in mind, yet still participates in cultural tourism activities while at the destination. Lastly, the serendipitous cultural tourist (low centrality/deep experience) does not initially plan to engage with cultural heritage; however, they end up having a profound and meaningful cultural experience. This

typology is useful in understanding the varying degrees of motivation and involvement among cultural tourists and can inform tourism development and marketing strategies (UNWTO, 2018).

Therefore, heritage tourism is a dynamic and multifaceted form of travel centered around the exploration of cultural, historical, and natural legacies. It also includes a variety of subtypes such as cultural heritage tourism, architectural heritage tourism, industrial heritage tourism, natural heritage tourism, and faith tourism. These categories reflect different motivations and experiences but are unified by the tourist's desire to connect with the past and gain a deeper understanding of identity, tradition, nature, and place (Timothy & Boyd, 2003).

Cultural heritage tourism focuses on the intangible aspects of a community's culture—its music, food, festivals, customs, and oral traditions, like storytelling. Travelers are often drawn to these cultural expressions for their uniqueness and authenticity. They may participate in events like traditional dance performances, culinary tours, or folk-art workshops, and so on. Cultural heritage tourism plays a crucial role in preserving and revitalizing local traditions, often generating pride and economic opportunities for local governments, the tourism industry and communities (UNESCO, 2021a).

Architectural heritage tourism involves visiting sites of historical, aesthetic, or architectural significance, such as ancient ruins, castles, religious monuments, and old city quarters. Iconic destinations include the Pyramids in Egypt, Ottoman palaces in Türkiye, or the Colosseum in Rome. These sites often serve as visual representations of historical epochs and political power structures, drawing both cultural tourists and academic interest (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000).

Industrial heritage tourism, while less conventional, appeals to those interested in the material history of modernization and labor. It includes old factories, railroads, mining towns, and shipyards that have been preserved or repurposed for tourism. Destinations such as the Ruhr Valley in Germany or the Ironbridge Gorge in the UK offer educational insights into the industrial revolutions and the socio-economic changes they triggered. This form of tourism highlights the transformation of societies and promotes appreciation for social history (Edwards & Llurdési Coit, 1996).

Natural heritage tourism, on the other hand, emphasizes travel to landscapes and ecosystems that hold environmental and cultural significance. National parks, UNESCO biosphere reserves, and traditional agricultural landscapes fall within this category. These sites attract tourists seeking aesthetic beauty, outdoor recreation, and ecological education. The integration of conservation and tourism is key here, requiring responsible management to protect biodiversity and cultural practices linked to nature (UNESCO, 2021a).

Amid these various subtypes, faith tourism, also known as religious or spiritual tourism, stands out for its history in heritage tourism, longevity and emotional depth. It encompasses pilgrimages, visits to sacred sites, participation in religious festivals, and spiritual retreats. While many faith tourists are motivated by religious devotion, others are drawn by the historical and architectural significance of religious heritage. For instance, non-Christians may visit Al-Aqsa or Vatican City to explore their rich histories, just as non-Buddhists may seek the serenity of temples in Thailand or Japan (Raj & Morpeth, 2007).

Faith tourism is one of the oldest forms of travel and remains highly significant today. According to the UNWTO, an estimated 300 to 330 million people engage in religious travel each year, making it one of the largest and most resilient segments of global tourism (UNWTO, 2018). Major examples include the Hajj to Mecca, the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, or the rituals at the Ganges River in India. In addition to its spiritual value, faith tourism supports

local economies, encourages intercultural exchange, and contributes to the maintenance of religious heritage sites.

However, faith tourism also brings about some challenges. The tension between preserving sacredness and catering to tourist expectations can lead to the commodification of religious practices. Overcrowding at holy sites may compromise both the visitor experience and the spiritual ambiance. Therefore, the integration of sustainable tourism strategies and community involvement is essential to protect the integrity of religious heritage (Shackley, 2001).

In conclusion, heritage tourism is a rich and evolving domain that allows travelers to engage deeply with the historical, cultural, natural, and spiritual dimensions of destinations. While each subtype offers distinct experiences—from exploring ancient monuments to attending sacred rituals—they collectively serve to foster historical awareness, cultural empathy, and sustainable development. Among these, faith tourism remains a particularly profound expression of heritage travel, reflecting humanity's enduring search for meaning, belonging, and connection through history.

Heritage tourism assets can broadly be classified into tangible and intangible heritage resources, each playing a crucial role in attracting tourists and enriching visitor experiences while also enhancing the quality of life for locals. Tangible heritage encompasses physical assets that visitors can directly experience, including historic heritage—such as archaeological sites, historic towns, castles, monuments, museums, and sacred structures—and natural heritage, including protected areas, national parks, geological formations, and landscapes recognized for their ecological significance. Conversely, intangible heritage comprises the non-material cultural practices, expressions, traditions, and knowledge passed through generations. Examples include local arts and crafts, folklore, traditional music and dances, storytelling, rituals, and culinary traditions. These intangible elements offer visitors a deeper connection to the local culture, enhancing authenticity and fostering cultural understanding. Together, tangible and intangible heritage assets form a complementary relationship that reinforces cultural identity, sustains local economies, promotes intercultural dialogue, and ensures holistic tourism development (UNESCO, 2024a; Park, 2014).

1.1.1. Tangible Heritage

Tangible heritage consists of physical assets representing the historical, architectural, spiritual, archaeological, and natural significance of a destination. These heritage resources include historical monuments, archaeological sites, museums, religious buildings, historic towns, palaces, fortresses, and battlefields, each offering visitors a direct encounter with the past. Tangible heritage also covers natural landmarks and landscapes, such as national parks, protected ecological areas, nature reserves, mountains, forests, wildlife, and geological formations, which possess distinct cultural or ecological value. These physical heritage sites serve as primary attractions in heritage tourism, providing opportunities for education, recreation, and cultural exchange. They play an essential role in shaping destination identity, fostering community pride, and driving economic growth through tourism revenues. Effective conservation and sustainable management of tangible heritage assets are crucial, as they are vulnerable to various threats, including overtourism, environmental degradation, wars, natural disasters, urbanization, agricultural and industrial pressures, and climate change impacts (Timothy, 2018; Pedersen, 2022).

1.1.2. Historic Heritage

Historic heritage primarily includes buildings, structures, monuments, archaeological remains, and historically significant places. These assets represent critical elements of a community's

identity, providing tangible links to the past (Gargiulo et al., 2023). Examples include ancient ruins such as Göbekli Tepe in Türkiye, the Pantheon in Italy, Osun Oshogbo in Nigeria, medieval fortresses, castles, museums, housing artifacts, historical towns, and UNESCO World Heritage sites. Maintaining historic heritage requires preservation strategies aimed at protecting authenticity, integrity, and historical value against threats like deterioration, urban sprawl, and uncontrolled tourism development (Ahmad, 2013).

1.1.3. Natural Heritage

Natural heritage comprises landscapes, ecosystems, biodiversity hotspots, protected areas, geological and physiographical formations, and natural landmarks that hold environmental, ecological, aesthetic, or scientific value. These areas attract visitors interested in eco-tourism, wildlife observation, adventure tourism, and educational tourism experiences. Sites like national parks, biosphere reserves, mountains, caves, lakes, forests, coral reefs, and waterfalls represent significant natural heritage resources. Preserving natural heritage necessitates effective environmental management, sustainable tourism practices, regulation of visitor numbers, managing carrying capacities, and careful planning to mitigate human-induced pressures, climate change effects, and ecological degradation (Newsome et al., 2013).

1.1.4. Intangible Heritage

Intangible heritage refers to non-material cultural practices, traditions, knowledge, and expressions passed down across generations within communities. It encompasses various forms of cultural expression, including folklore, music, traditional crafts, festivals, storytelling, dances, rituals, ceremonies, culinary traditions, and language. Intangible heritage provides visitors with deeper, more immersive cultural experiences, contributing to cultural authenticity and sustaining local identities. Preserving intangible heritage involves actively supporting cultural transmission, engaging local communities, and promoting cultural awareness among tourists to ensure these practices remain respected and meaningful (UNESCO, 2024b; Park, 2014).

Cultural heritage within the intangible domain includes diverse expressions of human creativity, identity, and community life. It encompasses folk dances, traditional music, crafts such as pottery, weaving, marbling, and calligraphy, culinary traditions and gastronomy, oral histories, rituals, ceremonies, and spiritual or religious practices like the Semah rituals. These living traditions and skills connect people with their histories, strengthen communal bonds, and offer tourists authentic cultural engagement and deeper insights into local life. Cultural heritage requires careful safeguarding strategies that empower local practitioners, prevent commodification, and encourage respectful visitor participation (Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Richards, 2020). Hence, intangible cultural heritage is often neglected as a tourism product despite their potential.

2. Sustainable Heritage Tourism

Sustainable heritage tourism involves managing tourism activities in ways that ensure the long-term preservation of heritage assets while simultaneously delivering socio-economic benefits. It emphasizes responsible use of heritage resources, safeguarding them for future generations, and fostering meaningful interactions between tourists, local communities, and heritage sites. Tourism sustainability can be approached from three perspectives: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic sustainability. Therefore, the management of heritage tourism in OIC countries outlined in this research project aims to facilitate improvement of the quality of sustainable heritage tourism development, cultural protection, and economic improvement related to both tangible and intangible tourism resources. The success of sustainable heritage tourism requires a multidimensional strategy grounded in three critical dimensions: environmental, socio-cultural, and economic. These are discussed from the heritage tourism aspect as follows:

2.1. Environmental Dimensions

Environmental sustainability in heritage tourism focuses on minimizing the ecological footprint of tourism activities on heritage sites. It includes strategies such as effective waste management, controlling visitor numbers to mitigate overtourism, introducing and respecting carrying capacities, and implementing risk management, conservation practices to protect landscapes, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Climate change presents a significant threat to heritage sites, causing issues such as erosion, flooding, and deterioration of cultural assets (UNESCO, 2009). UNESCO's World Heritage Committee assessed numerous State of Conservation Reports to understand threats from large projects against World Heritage sites, identifying extensive developments such as highways, skyscrapers, shopping centers, wind power facilities, and changes in land use as significant threats (ICOMOS, 2011).

The protection of cultural and natural heritage relies heavily on Impact Assessment methodologies that evaluate developmental threats (ICOMOS, 2011). Further impacts of tourism-related facility developments include erosion, pollution, ecosystem destruction, and risks to wildlife. Effective environmental sustainability practices involve impact analysis, demand management, and establishing visitor routes and limitations to minimize these impacts. Additionally, heritage sites often face severe threats from wars and natural disasters (i.e., Earthquakes, wildfires, floods), which can lead to irreversible damage and loss of heritage assets. Hence, sustainable strategies must include risk preparedness and emergency response measures to mitigate these impacts.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), heightens a global awareness for sustainability, particularly reflected in Goals 8, 11, 12, and 14, and heritage tourism is an indispensable component of environmental sustainability. Furthermore, UN Tourism Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics' article 7, paragraph 2 reads “Tourism policies and activities should be conducted with respect for the artistic, archaeological and cultural heritage, which they should protect and pass on to future generations; particular care should be devoted to preserving monuments, worship sites, archaeological and historic sites as well as upgrading museums which must be widely open and accessible to tourism visits” (World Tourism Organization, 2020). It highlights strengthening the dialogue between tourism and culture and informed decision-making in heritage tourism through promoting the exchange of good practices, highlighting inclusive management systems and innovative cultural tourism experiences.

The UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Program deals with tourism planning and heritage management thoroughly with the involvement of every group of stakeholders, promoting responsible tourism, building capacity, and boosting awareness to ensure the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and the sustainability of local development (UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 2025). For example, the UNWTO Kyoto Declaration on Tourism and Culture in 2019 explicitly highlights the importance of engaging all stakeholders (e.g., destination authorities-DMOs, academia, and the private sector) in the greater value of cultures for destinations and the role of heritage and creativity in expanding diversity, economic prosperity and long-term sustainability (WTO, 2019).

So far, various approaches to managing destinations with a large volume of cultural heritage have been established within the field of sustainable tourism. For example, CT&VM (Cultural Tourism & Visitor Management Framework) and VMAST (Visitor Management Assessment & Strategy Tool) are essential instruments utilized for the preservation of cultural heritage and the administration of sustainable tourism. CT&VM is a framework established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) that seeks to harmonize heritage management with visitor flow (ICOMOS, 2023). VMAST is a tool created by the UNESCO World Cultural Center, with the cooperation of ICOMOS, designed to formulate sustainable visitor management plans in cultural sites. These frameworks facilitate the sustainable growth of heritage tourism through concepts such as balanced visitor management, local community engagement, data-driven planning, and awareness enhancement. This report will explore such approaches from the perspective of OIC countries, contributing to a more inclusive and context-sensitive heritage tourism strategy.

2.2. Socio-cultural Dimensions

Social sustainability involves engaging local communities in heritage tourism activities, ensuring their social and cultural integrity, and providing direct benefits to improve their well-being and protect their lifestyle. It includes respecting local traditions, promoting inclusive participation, and fostering equitable economic opportunities through tourism. Conflicts may arise due to contrasting stakeholder interests, making community involvement vital for sustainable management (UNESCO, 2014). Sustainable heritage tourism allows both hosts and guests to achieve cultural connection and mutual understanding (Timothy, 2015). Travelers' decisions are also shaped by socio-cultural perspectives and authenticity, seeking genuine cultural experiences that foster altruism, social interaction, and emotional connections (Lee et al., 2020; Dai et al., 2021).

Social impacts to be managed include exploitation of local populations, mass consumption of sites, inappropriate reconstruction, commodification, and intrusive presentations. Effective social sustainability requires preservation of authenticity, promoting local employment and capacity building, respecting local and spiritual values, enhancing community involvement, providing high-quality visitor information, safety, sanitation, comfort, and minimizing visitor fluctuations. Heritage tourism also significantly enhances community health and wellbeing when communities are included in governance and resource access (Brooks et al., 2023).

Furthermore, through heritage tourism, it is possible to perpetuate the cultural identity of destinations by teaching the next generation the value of their heritage while obtaining revenue and jobs for indigenous communities (WTTC, 2024). From this perspective, the attractiveness promotional factors for the young population for both the national and international heritage tourism sectors require more attention from responsible authorities. According to KPMG, there are several other emerging trends in the heritage tourism market, including sustainable tourism,

storytelling, technology integration (e.g., virtual reality and augmented reality), customized experience, community involvement, and integration of culture with economics (KPMG, 2024). Similarly, Dai et al. (2021) also underscored that access to information on heritage sites, in conjunction with the quality of infrastructure and support services, is crucial in influencing heritage tourism. Hence, improving digital infrastructure and technology skills are essential for conforming to global smart tourism trends and fostering sustainable tourism practices while protecting cultural heritage and natural resources (SESRIC, 2024).

2.3. Economics Dimensions

Historical and archeological sites, landmark monuments, religious sites, museums, art galleries and collections, traditional fairs and festivals, cuisines, performances, handicrafts, and destinations rich in architecture (local housing, historic mansions, etc.) are often attributed as heritage tourism products (KPMG, 2024). With those various elements, the heritage tourism sector directly and indirectly influences the GDPs of national economies, allowing protection for existing heritage resources and the introduction of new tangible and intangible heritage assets. Along with the national development strategies, the growing popularity of UNESCO World Heritage Sites is positively influencing the market. According to the IMARCH report, global heritage tourism market size reached 587.1 billion USD and will be reached approximately 843.5 billion USD by 2033, exhibiting a growth rate (CAGR) of 3.51% during 2025-2033 (IMARCH, 2024).

Academic studies also highlight the positive economic effects of heritage tourism, including increased revenues, multiplier effects, and employment (Chong & Balasingam, 2019; Farid, 2015). Tourism receipts also create much-needed funds for the preservation of the resources. Hence, economic sustainability for heritage tourism refers to the capacity of heritage tourism to provide stable economic benefits without compromising the quality of heritage resources. Heritage tourism significantly contributes to local economies by generating employment, supporting local businesses, and stimulating investment in infrastructure and services (Bandarin, 2007).

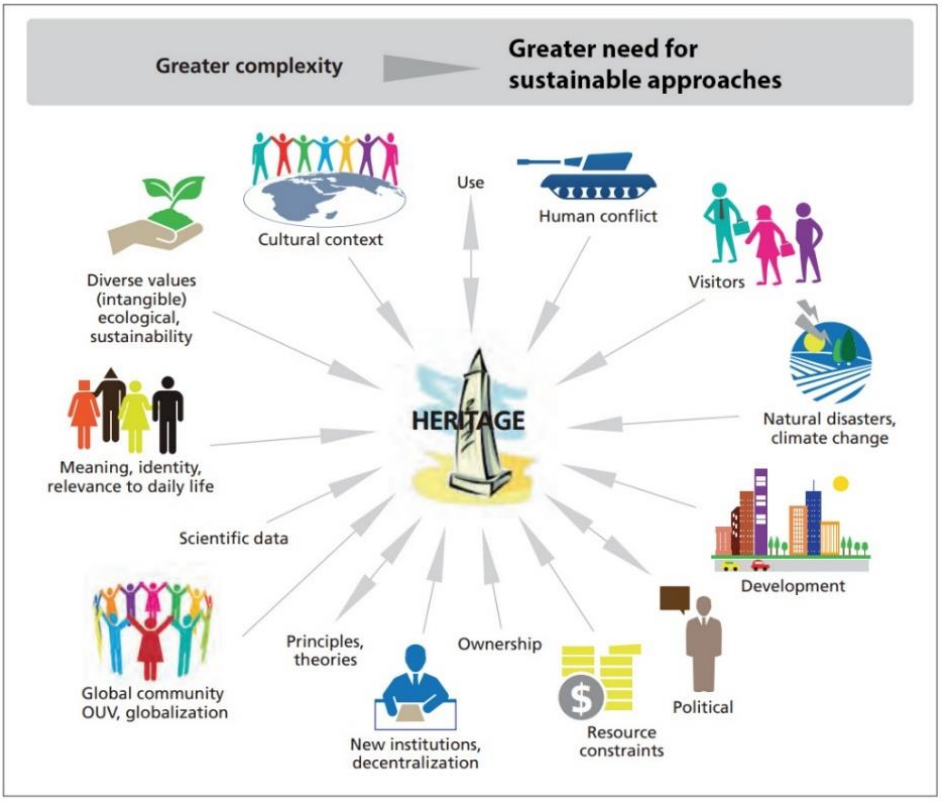
For OIC countries, tourism revenues have shown positive influences on economic growth and vice versa (Uula et al., 2023; Qoir, 2023). The Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (ICTM, 2013) emphasized the relevance of sustainable tourism to economic, cultural, and social connections, as well as poverty alleviation strategies and sustainable development (Bilim, 2017). Economic sustainability includes allocating tourism revenues to heritage protection, conservation, and community benefit. Heritage tourism provides essential funds and incentives for environmental conservation, including protected area management, biodiversity initiatives, and ecological restoration projects (UNESCO, 2012). Additionally, heritage tourism generates secondary economic advantages, often yielding higher tourist spending compared to other forms of tourism. Heritage tourists typically prioritize experience quality over price, even though heritage sites usually may have low or no entry fees (Ashworth, 2000).

The World Heritage List has steadily grown since the adoption of the World Heritage Convention in 1972. However, minimizing exposure to damage is essential for the sustainability of heritage sites and the cultural activities they support. Heritage conservation funds contribute to sustainable development by safeguarding historically and culturally significant buildings, which serve as anchors of identity and continuity.

To preserve this cultural value while maintaining the uniqueness of each site, it is important to implement optimal and sustainable management strategies (Syed Ariffin et al., 2015). As the definition of heritage broadens and challenges grow in complexity, society must be actively

involved in holistic, long-term stewardship. Inclusive management strategies that account for environmental, cultural, and social factors must be sustainable in their own right. The growing significance of heritage—be it for tourism, education, or communal value—renders the preservation of heritage essential for a sustainable future (Azhari & Mohamed, 2012). Figure 3 illustrates a number of both historical and contemporary issues in heritage management, highlighting an increase in complexity and a heightened demand for appropriate management strategies relevant to tangible heritage management.

Figure 3. Changing landscape of heritage management: Traditional and emerging issues



Source: (UNESCO, 2013)

In particular, heritage tourism management can be approached from two key aspects: "Managing Tourism for Heritage" and "Managing Heritage for Tourists". Together, these two perspectives demonstrate the complex interplay between tourism, heritage management, and local development, with each approach playing a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability and value of heritage tourism (Ashworth, 2000). Depending on the characteristics of the destination and heritage attractions, each approach provides various insights. Figure 3 illustrates these relationships.

Figure 4. Tourism for Heritage vs Heritage for Tourism

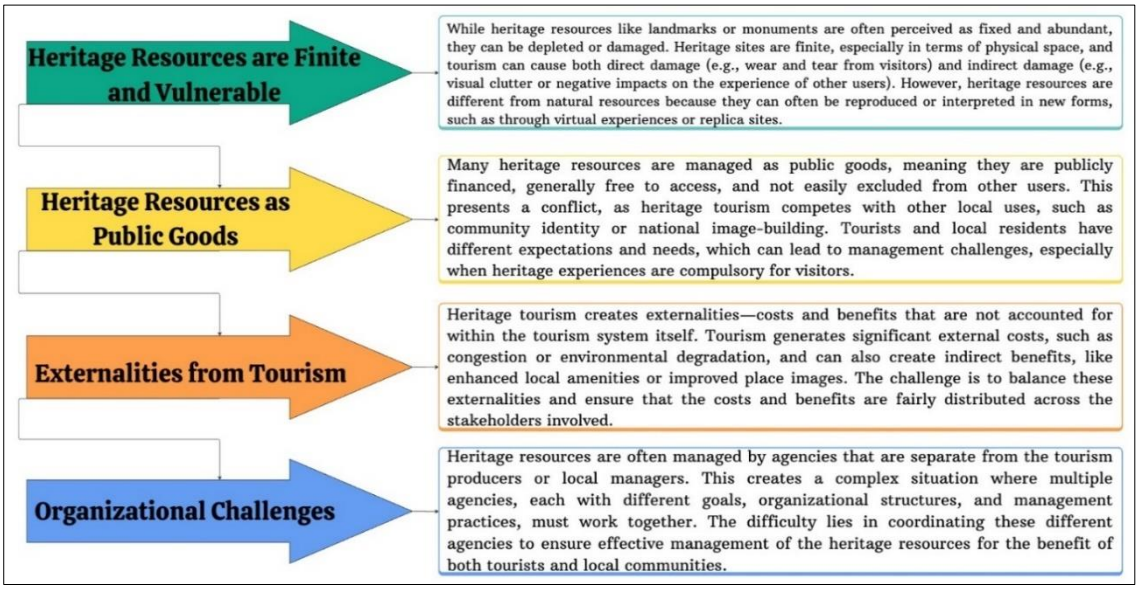
Approach	Definition	Key Contexts	Tourist Behavior	Considerations
MANAGING TOURISM FOR HERITAGE	Focuses on understanding both the heritage resource and the nature of heritage tourists.	Operates within two growing contexts: increased travel and the commodification of cultural products.	Highly selective, tourists gravitate towards iconic and spectacular sites in search of 'authenticity,' while everyday heritage elements are often overlooked.	Differing expectations and behaviors of tourists compared to local residents must be considered.
MANAGING HERITAGE FOR TOURISTS	Emphasizes the integration of heritage into local development strategies.	Heritage sites must be planned and clustered in a way that fosters economic and cultural benefits.	Ensures that heritage is used for tourism while benefiting local communities both economically and culturally.	Heritage management should align with broader urban planning efforts for sustainable development.

Source: (Ashworth, 2000)

Figure 4 compares two distinct management strategies between heritage (sites of cultural or historical value) and tourism. The "Managing tourism for heritage" strategy emphasizes heritage conservation and recognizes tourism within this framework. This strategy evolves in response to growing travel and cultural product commercialism, ignoring ordinary heritage features, and visitors are constantly searching for authentic and iconic sites. Thus, it is considered that visitors' expectations and conduct might differ from those of local communities. Conversely, the "Managing heritage for tourists" approach intends to incorporate heritage into strategies for regional development. Heritage management in this context is fitted with more general urban planning initiatives, and those places are designed and grouped in a manner that maximizes economic and cultural benefits of local communities while heritage is capitalized for tourism.

Nevertheless, within the framework of sustainable development, cultural heritage tourism has several goals that have to be achieved (Norhasimah et al., 2024): the preservation of cultural resources, accurate interpretation of resources, authentic travel experience, and growth of revenues from the cultural resources. Consequently, heritage tourism is not only focused on identification, administration, and preservation of the heritage values but also in understanding the impact of tourism on communities and regions, achieving economic and social benefits, providing financial resources for protection, as well as marketing and promotion. On the other hand, tourists' experience with heritage is an essential instrument for improving a national image, assisting individuals to conceive, visualize and reinforce their national identity (Park, 2010). Therefore, effective management is key to addressing these challenges, and the solution lies in clearly understanding the characteristics of heritage tourism, setting clear objectives, and specifying who is responsible for managing the resources and for whose benefit. Ashworth (2000) determined the key characteristics of heritage tourism management as presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Four key characteristics of heritage tourism resources



Source: (Ashworth, 2000)

Figure 5 depicts the four principal problems that heritage managers face. The uniqueness and vulnerable state of heritage resources require proper utilization because of both physical and experiential deterioration. The public accessibility nature of heritage resources results in conflicts of interest between local communities and visitors. While tourism externalities can have negative impacts, such as environmental damage or traffic, they can also provide positive economic contributions; what is important is the fair sharing of these benefits and losses. Ultimately, a non-effective organization arises from incoordination of responsible institutions, which complicates heritage management. Therefore, supporting long-term ecological and socioeconomic sustainability calls for careful management of tourism activity, balancing development of tourism with conservation initiatives, and includes local stakeholders in decision-making. According to Mitchell et al (1997) heritage managers and governments ought to carefully select stakeholders based on three main criteria—their capacity to influence choices, their legitimate authority in implementation, and the urgency of their impact. Because involving such stakeholders guarantees a balanced power dynamic between the local community, tourism industry and the government, therefore supporting efficient heritage management and assuring the preservation of cultural heritage (Xu, 2007). Research shows that sufficient local community and stakeholder involvement in the planning stage of heritage sites management improve perceptions and raises their willingness to participate in protecting the heritage sites (Adetunji, 2024).

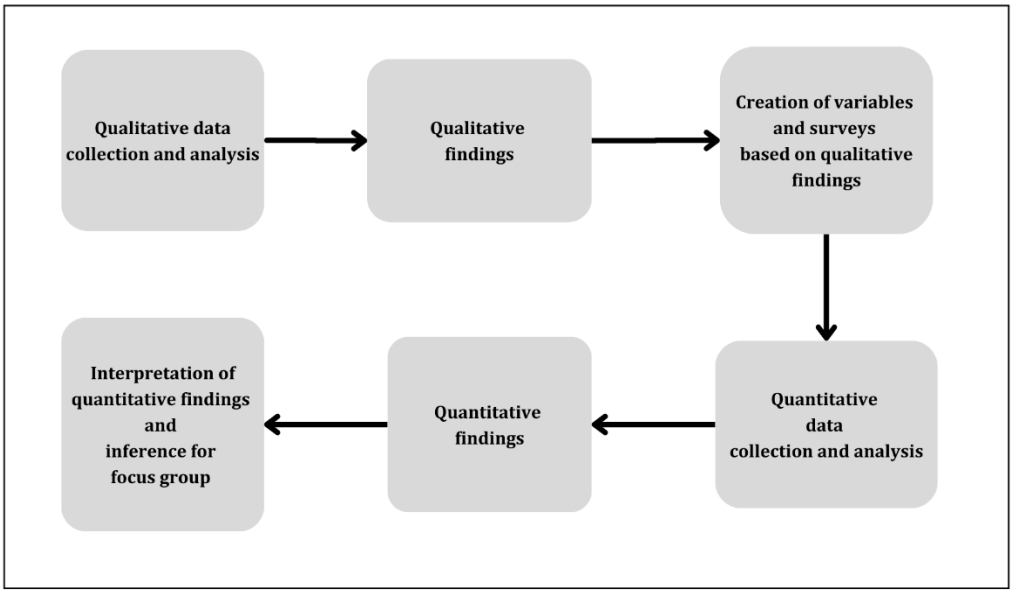
3. Methodology and State of the Art

3.1. Methodological Overview

Because of its exploratory nature, the report adopts a mixed-methods approach by combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Using both primary and secondary data collected from five case countries and international organizations, this systematic research methodology allows researchers to analyze heritage tourism quality and sustainability based on comparative research by sampling various OIC member countries (i.e., Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, and Senegal) and a non-OIC destination (i.e., Italy). Such an approach creates a strategic pathway for sustainable heritage tourism management by collecting and analyzing empirical qualitative and quantitative data. In addition to primary data collection, the study will integrate secondary data sources, including a comprehensive literature review, policy documents, international reports (e.g., COMCEC, OIC, SESRIC, UNESCO, UNWTO, ICOMOS), research papers, and statistical datasets from global and regional sources. This approach will provide a solid, evidence-based foundation for the analysis and contribute to benchmarking sustainability efforts across the OIC countries.

The mixed-method design helped to achieve specific objectives, including qualitative and quantitative outcomes through a sequential design (Cresswell & Clark, 2007). First, qualitative interviews were employed for data collection and analysis; after that, a quantitative survey was used to measure variables identified based on the literature review and the qualitative stage. At the end of this empirical stage, the findings were shared with experts during two focus groups in order to enhance the validity of the findings. The process for applying the sequential experimental research design is presented below (Figure 6):

Figure 6. Sequential Mixed Method Design



Source: (Researchers' own creation)

3.2. Qualitative In-depth Interviews

The empirical data collection process of the research will begin by conducting 20 in-depth interviews (see Apendix-2) with heritage tourism managers and policymakers and industry experts from OIC member countries (i.e., Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal). By doing so, it will

explore heritage assets together with their sustainability, governance, marketing strategies, funding mechanisms, and visitor experience. The interview results were recorded with consent following participant approval, then transcribed verbatim for thematic content analysis.

Thematic content analysis, rooted in the phenomenological approach, was employed to derive themes and patterns from the qualitative data. Following the six-phase thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012), the interviews were transcribed, and open coding procedures were applied to identify recurring themes. Key themes emerging from participant transcriptions were added to the data pool using the NVIVO qualitative analysis program. This data pool will enable researchers to make inferences about the fundamental aspects of the study by leveraging it, associating them with other themes (axial coding), and linking them with existing literature (selective coding). Therefore, deductive reasoning was used to extract secondary themes from the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), supported by an inductive approach with reference to prior theory and research (secondary data; Gummersson, 2000).

To enhance the reliability of the findings, the coding procedure in the project was independently handled by a set of consulting academic experts in different countries (Indonesia, Senegal, and Türkiye) specializing in heritage tourism, and several meetings were convened to discuss primary dimensions (Sikolia et al., 2013) to improve the reliability of the findings. Additionally, to increase validity, direct quotes from participants were shared in the report (Elo & Kyngas, 2007).

As discussed above, the coding process is fundamentally comprised of three steps: open, axial, and selective. In the initial phase, the researchers read the transcribed data multiple times and then thematically code them into different units of meaning through the relevant open coding procedures (Lune & Berg, 2016). In the second stage (axial coding), similarities, differences, and relationships were examined, and open codes were subcategorized into sub-themes (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). In the final stage (selective coding), after the axial coding step, the selective coding was applied to establish the main themes of the analysis, also informed by the literature. The identified themes and common aspects from these interviews informed the report, helped plan, and develop the surveys as described below.

3.3. Surveys

The research also administered a structured questionnaire to 130 key stakeholders, including government officials, private sector representatives, and experts, following the qualitative phase in Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal (see Appendix 3). The questionnaire evaluates participants' perceptions of sustainability and quality of heritage tourism based on existing literature and interview findings. The survey deployed reliable assessment tools, which include the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria) for sustainability (Bricker & Schultz, 2011), the Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale (SUS-TAS; Hsu et al., 2020), Heritage Experience Scale (Su et al., 2020), the Tourism Governance Scorecard (TGS; Vila et al., 2010), and the SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) for visitor experience evaluation. The quantitative analysis employed descriptive statistics using central tendency measures together with dispersion analysis as well as cross-tabulation and correlation statistics. A five-point Likert type scale was used to measure the importance of each item where "1" denotes the lowest and "5" represent the highest. The mean ratings were reported in the findings, with "3" stand for a value in the middle of the rating. The letter M represents the mean (average) ratings.

3.4. Focus Group Discussions

In the last stage of the data collection and analysis, the validity of the results was confirmed through two focus group discussions that took place in two OIC member states (Senegal and Indonesia). Eight experts in heritage tourism participated in each of the scheduled focus group sessions. The focus groups not only confirmed the validity of findings but also captured additional stakeholder perspectives to create suggestions that enhance heritage tourism sustainability and quality.

A final report served as a benchmark for sustainability practices by providing sustainable heritage tourism actions and quality improvement strategies. The research team conducted a thorough analysis of collected data to produce hands-on recommendations that would facilitate best practices within heritage tourism for OIC nations. The research combines data from primary sources with secondary data to establish a comprehensive foundation for creating OIC heritage tourism development strategies that address sustainability problems as well as improve heritage tourism quality across the OIC region.

3.5. Case Studies

The report also incorporated case studies to provide a benchmark analysis to identify and adopt best practices and provide recommendations for the OIC countries. To ensure a comprehensive and comparative analysis, six potential case study countries that represent diverse heritage tourism governance models, conservation strategies, funding mechanisms, and management approaches were selected both in and out of the OIC. By analyzing their governance models, funding structures, marketing strategies, and sustainability approaches, this study generated actionable recommendations for OIC Member States to develop competitive and sustainable heritage tourism destinations.

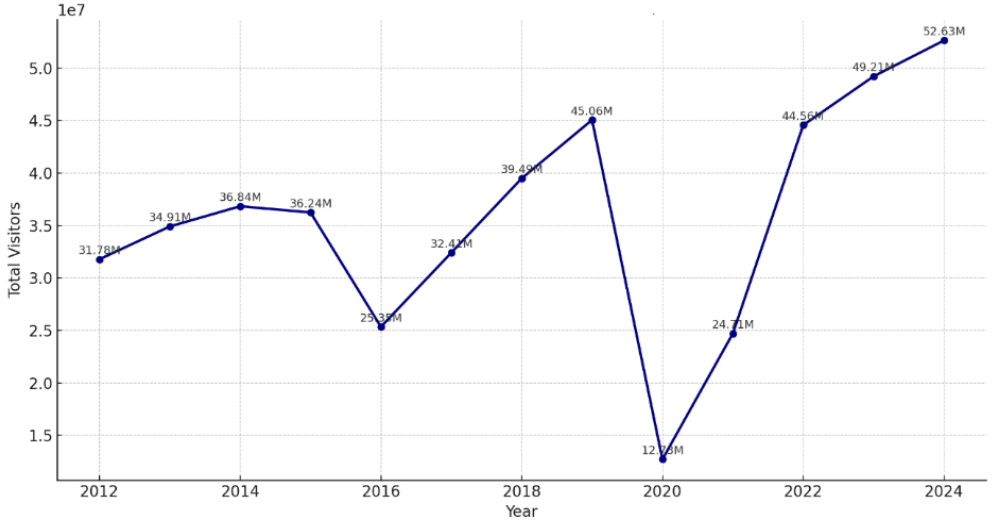
4. Mapping of Good Practices and Findings

4.1. Case Country: Türkiye

4.1.1. General Outlook of Heritage Tourism in Türkiye

Türkiye has grown in popularity as a key tourism destination, attracting international travelers all over the world. Its rich history, multi-cultural demography, diverse nature, and unique geographical position bridging Europe and Asia, make the country home to various civilizations and cultures; hence, offering a rich variety of heritage site assets. It also offers various tourism opportunities, including both 3S (sun-sand-sea) and other alternative forms of tourism. Türkiye's tourism revenue increased by 8.3% in 2024, reaching 61.1 billion US dollars, while the total number of visitors reached 62.2 million, of which 52.6 million were foreign visitors and 9.6 million were citizens residing abroad. Apart from its rich tourism resources, Türkiye has been investing heavily in its tourism infrastructure and superstructure. For instance, the number of travel agencies in Türkiye increased from 4,077 in 2000 to 16786 in 2025, by approximately 311.7%. Currently, according to the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, more than 21.225 accommodation options exist with a bed capacity of almost 2 million (TMoCT, 2025a). Türkiye also has 59 airports, which served around 230 million passengers (140 million of which were international) in 2024 (DHMI, 2025). Figure 7 illustrates changes in the volume of foreign visitors to Türkiye between 2012 and 2024.

Figure 7. Total Number of Foreign Visitors to Türkiye (2012 - 2024)



Source: (Turkish Statistical Institute & Ministry of Culture and Tourism)

Amidst this flourishing tourism industry, heritage tourism has become a key driver of creativity and sustainable development. The TMoCT and local governments have been very active in recording and registering heritage resources. For example, Türkiye hosts a total of 22 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 20 of which are cultural and 2 are mixed. Mixed heritage sites contain elements of both natural and cultural importance. Türkiye has also various heritage assets on the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List. As of 2025, the number of cultural, historical, and natural heritage sites in Türkiye on the Tentative List has reached 79. Due to efforts led by the TMoCT, Türkiye ranks second globally in terms of inscribed intangible cultural heritage elements, with 31 elements inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists, making a

total of 53 heritage sites listed by UNESCO. By highlighting the unique characteristics of tourist destinations, intangible cultural heritage serves as a key factor enriching and enhancing Türkiye's heritage tourism offerings. Safeguarding these intangible elements is essential not only for tourism development but also for maintaining the cultural identities of local communities (Li & Hunter, 2015).

Tükiye's diverse heritage spans from Göbekli Tepe, the world's earliest temple constructed by man, to Istanbul, the historic capital for prominent global empires ranging from Rome to the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, and to Çanakkale, renowned as the legendary site of both the Trojan War and the Turkish War of Independence. Additionally, Türkiye is rich in intangible cultural heritage, including traditional crafts such as weaving and "Hüsn-i hat" (traditional calligraphy in Islamic art), distinct folk dances and traditions, and spiritual rituals such as the Sufi ceremonies, traditional festivals, and so on. Despite Türkiye's abundant cultural heritage, intangible cultural elements (e.g., local cuisines, traditions, folk dances)—have garnered less attention compared to tangible heritage (Erkekli & Gülcan, 2021). However, there has been a growing recognition of intangible heritage as an important element for developing new tourism products or enhancing existing offerings during recent years particularly through Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA).

Overall, heritage tourism is widely acknowledged as an important part of the country's tourism strategy and for the growth of local communities and rural destinations. Being a prominent tourism destination, Türkiye delivers significant opportunities and an extensive range of potential heritage tourism products. Thus, encouraging heritage tourism in Türkiye through establishing a facilitating environment would make the destination more attractive. However, achieving this objective requires initially comprehending the main characteristics of Turkish heritage tourism, its unique heritage assets, pertinent challenges and obstacles impeding the growth of heritage tourism, and finally, by creating effective actions to improve the role of heritage tourism in the destination competitiveness of Türkiye. In particular, based on our qualitative data analysis with nine participants, the key challenges to Turkish heritage tourism development included commodification, an excessive focus on tangible heritage (n = 3; 33.3%), divergent heritage perspectives (n = 2; 22.2%), limitations in tourist segmentation (n = 5; 55.6%), absence of a regional brand identity (n = 2; 22.2%), low public awareness (n = 2; 22.2%), insufficient recognition of embodied heritage (n = 1; 11.1%), and limited awareness and use of Türkiye's rich underwater cultural heritage (n = 2; 22.2%), which remains largely invisible in tourism narratives and product development. Limited host–guest engagement (n = 2; 22.2%) and overtourism risks (n = 3; 33.3%) were also emphasized.

Table 1 illustrates the perceived sustainability of heritage tourism in Türkiye across several key dimensions. Respondents most strongly agree that heritage tourism provides economic benefits to local communities (M = 3.18), followed by moderate agreement that current policies support environmental conservation and sustainable practices (M = 3.05). However, lower mean scores indicate concerns about practical implementation: the preservation of heritage sites (M = 2.70), effective visitor management (M = 2.52), and the existence of climate adaptation strategies such as flood or fire protection (M = 2.48) are viewed as underdeveloped. Overall, while economic and policy-level contributions are somewhat acknowledged, the findings suggest significant perceived gaps in operational measures and climate resilience at heritage sites in Türkiye.

Table 1. Sustainability of heritage tourism in Türkiye

Sustainability of heritage tourism	M
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.	3,18
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.	3,05
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.	2,70
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.	2,52
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).	2,48

4.1.2. Development and Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Türkiye

Understanding the development and characteristics of heritage tourism in Türkiye requires first, a quick look at tourism development in the country, where various liberalization efforts have been put in place since the 1980s. Despite some attempts to capitalize on tourism as a development tool in Türkiye since the 1960s, it was not until the 1980s that tourism received significant focus and incentives (e.g., infrastructure investments, land allocations, tax subsidies) in using it as a means for economic development. The Tourism Encouragement Law of 1982 was introduced during this period, hence leading to the evolution of tourism and supporting a rapid increase in the number of visitors and tourism revenues (Yolal, 2016). This first period also brought various strategies on infrastructure development (e.g., construction of roads and airports), strong marketing and promotion, and tourism incentives. These initiatives enabled Türkiye to become a major tourist destination for leisure travelers, business travelers, and cultural and heritage travelers (COMCEC, 2021). After this period, from 1980 onwards, tourism steadily developed, putting Türkiye in an advanced position in terms of tourist arrivals and tourism receipts, making it the world's 4th best destination for tourist arrivals as of 2024 (World Tourism Organization, 2024).

Since the 1980s, tourism in Türkiye has developed, especially with a focus on mass tourism; however, later on, various specific objectives such as increasing the length of stay and spreading tourism to twelve months have caused Türkiye to focus on the development of alternative tourism types. The prior Tourism Strategy of Türkiye - 2023, reflects this approach (TMoCT, 2007). Heritage tourism has a distinct advantage over other alternative forms of tourism, as it extends the tourism season throughout the year, generates employment opportunities and per capita income, and enhances the region's international recognition (Li & Hunter, 2015). Recognizing these benefits, Türkiye has increasingly prioritized heritage tourism and sustainability within its national tourism strategy in recent years.

Türkiye Tourism Strategy (2023)—adopted in 2007— also marked a strategic transition from promoting the country as a whole to developing and marketing tourism at the destination level. This shift introduced policies and institutional frameworks that emphasized destination management and branding, leading to more effective outcomes such as product diversification and better targeting of specific tourist segments. A major institutional development in this context was the merger of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism in 2003, resulting in the establishment of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (TMoCT). This integration created a unique opportunity to align cultural heritage with tourism development, enabling a more coordinated approach to heritage tourism, particularly in terms of site management, promotional strategies, and sustainable use of cultural assets.

By taking a holistic view of tourism motivations, closely monitoring market changes and evolving tourist profiles, and enhancing promotional efforts, the Tenth (2014–2018) and Eleventh (2019–2023) Development Plans defined destination management as a cornerstone of tourism policy. These plans emphasized the importance of aligning tourism with regional development strategies, supporting the active engagement of local governments, NGOs, and the public in areas with high tourism potential, and encouraging environmentally conscious and culturally sensitive sustainable tourism practices. Through this integrated and participatory model, heritage tourism in Türkiye is positioned not only as a driver of economic development but also as a mechanism for cultural preservation and community empowerment.

As Boniface and Fowler (1993) emphasize, heritage tourism evolves in response to the changing motivations of tourists, as heritage values are reinterpreted and incorporated into tourism experiences. In this context, Türkiye has actively sought to leverage its vast cultural and natural wealth to expand its position in the heritage tourism sector. The country is home to a wide array of culturally significant sites—including palaces, ancient cities, shrines, nature reserves, caravanserais, and archaeological ruins—all of which serve as major attractions. In addition, intangible cultural elements such as rural lifestyles, traditions, handicrafts, gastronomy, and local festivals are increasingly being utilized as part of the heritage tourism offering. Destinations and attractions such as the Topkapi Palace, Mevlana Museum, the Ephesus Archaeological Site, the Ancient City of Hierapolis, and the Göreme Archaeological Site draw millions of visitors annually and have become cornerstone examples of Türkiye's heritage tourism development. Table 2 illustrates the ten most visited museums and archaeological sites in Türkiye in 2024, based on visitor numbers.

Table 2. The Most Visited Museums and Archaeological Sites in Türkiye in 2024

Archaeological Sites in Türkiye	Number of Visitors (2024)
Topkapı Palace (Istanbul)	4.683.250
Mevlana Museum (Konya)	3.115.008
Ephesus Ruins (İzmir)	2.889.729
Hierapolis – Pamukkale (Denizli)	2.446.106
Göreme Ruins (Nevsehir)	1.290.392
Zelve – Pasabaglari (Nevsehir)	948.744
Republic Museum (Ankara)	884.277
Gobeklitepe Ruins (Sanliurfa)	731.794
Galata Tower (Istanbul)	763.202
Kaymakli Undergrpund City (Nevsehir)	695.893

Source: (Ekonomim.com & TRT Haber, 01 Ocak 2024)

In sum, Türkiye's heritage tourism sector has been shaped by a strategic approach, development plans, investments, promotional efforts, and international conservation initiatives over decades.

The heritage tourism sector of Türkiye demonstrates a diverse spectrum of historical and natural sites which incorporate various civilizations, religions cultural, natural reserves and intangible elements including food, traditions, arts and crafts. TMoCT collaborates with international organizations and programs, including UNESCO and ICOMOS for promoting and safeguarding heritage assets, as well as the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Program and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (ICOMOS, 2019). This policy improved the visibility and recognition of Türkiye's cultural assets (Eres, 2020). Though it has also centralized power inside the government, the outsourcing of commercial operations at museums and archaeological sites has contributed to visitor experience and increased interest as well (Shoup et al., 2014). According to our qualitative data, most participants (7 out of 9; 78%) highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder. For instance, **P4** states:

> *"This [development] has not a single dimension; it's an area that needs to be addressed from multiple perspectives. Therefore, it's crucial for all stakeholders operating in this area to have a say and contribute resources to it, to act together. Collaboration and a structured approach that empowers local stakeholders, rather than centralized management, yields much more effective results."*

Table 3 presents visitors' experience ratings regarding heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The highest-rated aspect is the *quality of guided tours and interpretation services* (M = 3.54), suggesting that experts generally find the informational and educational components of the visits to be satisfactory. This is followed by positive perceptions of *accessibility* (M = 3.32) and *safety and security* (M = 3.30), indicating relatively good conditions in terms of infrastructure and visitor protection. However, lower ratings are given for *cleanliness and maintenance of sites* (M = 3.07) and especially for the *availability of interactive and immersive experiences* (M = 2.96), such as storytelling or virtual reality tours. These results suggest that while core services and infrastructure are viewed positively, there is room for improvement in enhancing the engagement and experiential dimensions of heritage site visits in Türkiye.

Table 3. Visitors' experience ratings.

Visitors' experience	**M**
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.	3,54
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).	3,32
Safety and security at heritage sites.	3,30
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.	3,07
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).	2,96

Table 4 presents key performance indicators (KPIs) used to assess heritage tourism governance in Türkiye (n = 56). The highest rated indicator is *global recognition*, such as UNESCO World Heritage listings and international awards (M = 4.16), reflecting the importance placed on international status and prestige. This is followed by *visitor numbers and tourism revenue* (M = 4.07), highlighting the emphasis on economic metrics. *Conservation status of heritage sites* (M = 4.00) and *sustainability practices and environmental impact* (M = 3.93) are also considered important, indicating growing attention to environmental and preservation outcomes. *Community engagement and local benefits* (M = 3.80), while slightly lower, still hold relevance, suggesting that inclusive governance and equitable distribution of benefits are recognized but may be less systematically measured. Overall, the findings suggest that heritage tourism governance in Türkiye is assessed through a mix of international visibility, economic performance, site preservation, and sustainability outcomes, with somewhat less emphasis on community-level indicators.

Table 4. What key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to measure heritage tourism governance?

KPIs	M
Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards).	4,16
Visitor numbers and tourism revenue.	4,07
Conservation status of heritage sites.	4,00
Sustainability practices and environmental impact.	3,93
Community engagement and local benefits.	3,80

4.1.3. Heritage Tourism Assets in Türkiye

Türkiye's rich cultural heritage is internationally recognized by the tourism and cultural industries. For example, Türkiye currently has 22 cultural heritage sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among these, Cappadocia (Nevşehir-Kayseri, 1985) and Hierapolis-Pamukkale (Denizli, 1988) are inscribed under both cultural and natural criteria, highlighting Türkiye's rich and diverse contributions to world heritage (TMoCT, 2025b). Together with intangible heritage items, these are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Türkiye on UNESCO Tangible & Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists

Tangible Heritage Site	Location	Year Inscribed
Historic Areas of Istanbul	Istanbul	1985
Divriği Great Mosque and Hospital	Sivas	1985
Hattusha: the Hittite Capital	Çorum	1986
Mount Nemrut	Adıyaman	1987
Xanthos-Letoon	Antalya - Muğla	1988
Safranbolu City	Karabük	1994
Archaeological Site of Troy	Çanakkale	1998
Selimiye Mosque and Complex	Edirne	2011
Neolithic Site of Çatalhöyük	Konya	2012
Pergamon and its Multi-Layered Cultural Landscape	Izmir	2014
Bursa and Cumalıkızık: the Birth of the Ottoman Empire	Bursa	2014
Diyarbakır Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural Landscape	Diyarbakır	2015
Ephesus	Izmir	2015
Archaeological Site of Ani	Kars	2016
Aphrodisias	Aydın	2017
Göbeklitepe Archaeological Site	Şanlıurfa	2018
Arslantepe Mound	Malatya	2021
Gordion	Ankara	2023
Wooden Hypostyle Mosques of Medieval Anatolia	Afyon-Ankara-Eskişehir-Kastamonu- Konya	2023
Sardis and the Lydian Tumuli of Bin Tepe	Manisa	2025
Göreme National Park and the Rock Sites of Cappadocia	Nevşehir - Kayseri	1985
Pamukkale-Hierapolis	Denizli	1988

Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements	Year Inscribed
Arts of Meddah, Public Storytellers	2008
Mevlevi Sema Ceremony	2008
Aşıklık (Minstrelsy) Tradition	2009
Karagöz	2009
Nowruz	2009
Traditional Sohbet Meetings	2010
Semah, Alevi-Bektashi Ritual	2010
Kırkpınar Oil Wrestling Festival	2010
Ceremonial Keşkek Tradition	2011
Mesir Macunu Festival	2012
Turkish Coffee Culture and Tradition	2013
Ebru, Turkish Art of Marbling	2014
Flatbread Making and Sharing Culture: Lavash, Katryma, Jupka, Yufka[1]	2016
Traditional Craftsmanship of Çini-Making	2016
Spring Celebration, Hıdırellez	2017
Whistled Language	2017
Heritage of Dede Qorqud/Korkyt Ata/Dede Korkut, Epic Culture, Folk Tales and Music	2018
Traditional Turkish Archery	2019
Art of Miniature	2020
Traditional Intelligence and Strategy Game: Togyzqumalaq, Toguz Korgool, Mangala/Göçürme	2020
Hüsn-i Hat, traditional calligraphy in Islamic art in Türkiye	2021
Traditional Ahlat Stonework	2022
Culture of Çay (Tea), a Symbol of Identity, Hospitality and Social Interaction	2022
Sericulture and Traditional Production of Silk for Weaving	2022
Telling Tradition of Nasreddin Hodja/ Molla Nesreddin/ Molla Ependi/ Apendi/ Afendi Kozhanasyr Anecdotes	2022
Iftar/Eftari/Iftar/Iftor and Its Socio-Cultural Traditions	2023
Craftsmanship of Mother of Pearl Inlay	2023
Art of illumination: Təzhib/Tazhib/Zarhalkori/Tezhip/Naqqoshlik	2023
Craftsmanship and Performaning Art of Balaban/Mey	2023
Traditional Knowledge, Methods and Practices Concerning Olive Cultivation	2023
Traditional Bagpipe Making and Practice	2024

Source: UNESCO (2025b)

[1] Lavash, Katryma, Jupka, and Yufka are traditional flatbread types, differing in thickness and preparation methods, and often used in everyday meals or social gatherings.

Cultural heritage should also be evaluated not only in terms of tangible assets, but also as a reflection of the knowledge, traditions and human values that constitute these resources. In this regard, Türkiye has also 28 elements listed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as listed in the above table 5 (UNESCO Turkish National Commission, 2025). In addition, there are 3 elements inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, which means, 31 elements are inscribed on UNESCO ICH Lists in total.

Despite its substantial cultural assets, Türkiye—similar to many OIC member countries—possess only a modest share of global heritage tourism revenues, indicating a need for strategies to enhance its international competitiveness (Roknoddin Eftekhari et al., 2009). According to the latest Cultural Heritage Statistics, the number of registered heritage sites in Türkiye has exceeded 150 thousand with Istanbul leading as the city with the highest number of assets (33,869). Furthermore, the number of museums increased by 7.1% in 2023, totaling 606, while visitor numbers rose by 6.2%, reaching 55.7 million (TUIK, 2024).

Although these figures reflect notable growth in the heritage tourism sector, challenges persist—particularly around commercialization, overtourism, diversification, and the conservation of cultural sites (Timothy & Boyd, 2014). Hence, to reach the full potential of heritage tourism, there is a pressing need to strengthen sustainable tourism policies, enhance regional collaboration, and address imbalances in travel and infrastructure development (Alrawadieh, 2024; Dabour, 2003). In this regard, one of the participants (i.e., P5) noted the importance of the sustainability impact calculator as follows:

> *"There's a concept called the "Impact Calculator." For example, if a congress is held in a city, what will its financial contribution be to that city? Here, the financial impact is measured, in addition to the intangible (environmental and social) impact. ..." (**P5**)*

In conclusion, Türkiye's abundant and diverse cultural heritage holds immense potential for further tourism development. However, this potential can only be realized through effective management, sustainability strategies, and capacity building that ensure both the preservation of cultural assets and the equitable distribution of their social and economic benefits for current and future generations.

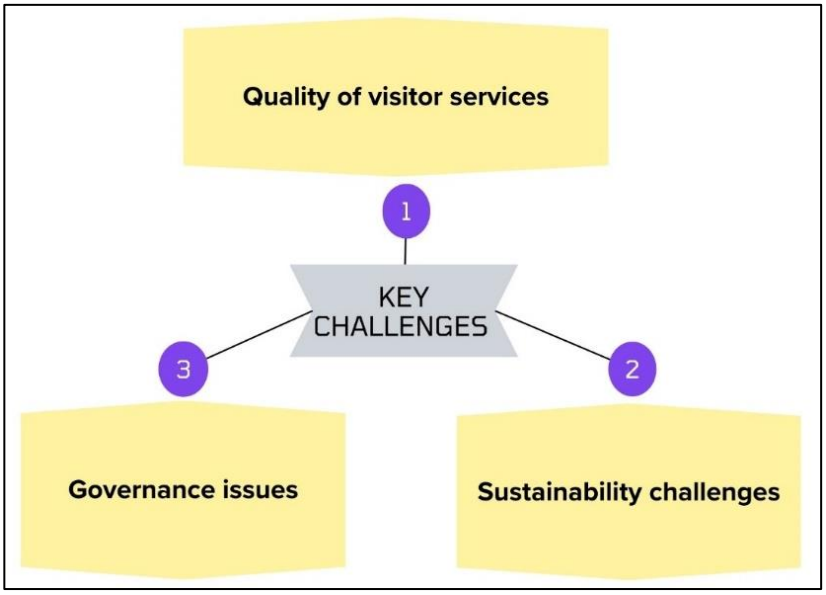
4.1.4. Challenges for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Türkiye

Heritage tourism in Türkiye is hindered by several obstacles, some of which are common across different sectors of the economy, while others are more inherently related to the nature of the heritage tourism (T&H) industry. Overall, key barriers to Turkish heritage tourism development can be grouped under three key themes; quality of visitor services, sustainability challenges, and governance issues (Figure 8), although the Sustainable Tourism Program, launched in 2022 and implemented with the approval of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, has just begun with the aim of addressing these challenges by maximizing social and economic benefits for local communities, enhancing cultural heritage, protecting biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes, reducing pollution, and conserving resources. Relatedly, the qualitative data analysis revealed that the participants emphasized enhancing service performance, securing diversified financial resources, and leveraging heritage tourism as soft power. For example, regarding effective site management planning, **P1** elaborated:

"[...] If you're going to open a cultural heritage site to tourism, the initial decision should be made before the archaeological excavation begins. Many factors need to be evaluated, such as whether the site is close to accommodation areas, transportation, whether continuous logistics can be provided, whether emergency and disaster plans can be developed, and the region's disaster status...If a site you've begun to bring to light can't be provided with a management plan and a sustainable cycle chain at the end of the day, you just dig it up and leave it there."

The majority of rural heritage sites in Türkiye because of physical and financial capacities have problems providing high-quality visitor services including heritage interpreters (i.e., qualified guides), multilingual materials, and inclusive digital services (e.g., digital guides, mobile apps, interactive maps, virtual tours, and online ticketing systems), which may hinder the efficiency of the visitor experience, causing long lines, particularly during peak tourist seasons. Regarding sustainability, climate change threatens the preservation of cultural assets; increased migration to and from heritage destinations also expedites commodification and gentrification, hence damaging conventional traditions and collective identities. While governance had previously faced challenges such as inadequate policy implementation, the absence of comprehensive, representative, and destination-specific management strategies, limited community engagement, low stakeholder awareness, and inefficiencies in long-term planning (Karakul & Yıldız, 2020), with the establishment of the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), rapid and coordinated efforts are now underway to address these issues. TGA seeks to enhance Turkey's position as a brand and attraction in domestic and international tourism markets by identifying, developing, and promoting tangible and intangible natural, cultural, biological, and human-made heritage. Through short-, medium-, and long-term communication and marketing efforts, TGA aims to increase tourism capacity, the contribution of tourism investments to the national economy, and service quality, with strategic decisions implemented via a public-private partnership composed of both public and private sector representatives. Dealing with these associated problems would further enable Türkiye to maintain its cultural heritage development while protecting its diverse heritage assets.

Figure 8. Key challenges of heritage tourism in Türkiye



Source: (Created by researchers)

The quality of tourism-related services delivered at the destination is essential for the sustainability and competitiveness of the Turkish Tourism and Heritage (T&H) industry. Policy reports—such as COMCEC (2021)—indicate that, like many OIC nations, Turkish tourism might still improve the diversity of tourism offerings, increase average tourist stay, and per capita spending. Thus, promoting heritage tourism development in Türkiye is probably going to enhance destinations' appeal by improving traveler experience, extending duration of stay, and increasing tourist per capita expenditure.

Moreover, sustainable heritage tourism faces multiple economic, environmental and social challenges that originate from the delicate balance of preserving sites and utilizing them in tourism. For instance, the pursuit of extra taxes and excessive revenue from tourism often drives overtourism, straining heritage destinations' sustainability. Over-tourism poses the primary challenge because it damages historical sites through high visitor traffic combined with insufficient infrastructure (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Increased foot traffic, pollution, inappropriate waste management, and agricultural activities can degrade cultural and natural landmarks, diminishing their authenticity and long-term sustainability (UNESCO, 2019a). In addition, rising commercialization, limited local ownership, inadequate restoration, and improper renovation damage cultural sites, hence alerting important issues for a better approach to heritage site preservation (UNESCO, 2019a).

Türkiye's heritage tourism sustainability further faces threats because of environmental deterioration, high risk of natural disasters (e.g., earthquake, forest fire, flood, drought, storm/tornado, and landslide), and climate change. Environmental degradation through a warming climate increases and major weather disturbances, combined with air pollution accelerate the deterioration of historic buildings, landscapes, and sites (Jigyasu, 2013). For instance, heavy rainfall coupled with rapid temperature fluctuations damages the fairy chimneys along with rock-carved churches within Cappadocia. Pamukkale's Travertens and Hierapolis also experience various threats from over-tourism activities, along with pollution and dropping water levels caused by climate change. Additionally, the nesting grounds of Caretta Caretta loggerhead sea turtles experience disruptions from increasing sea temperatures alongside beach resort and golf course development projects, which affect biodiversity as well as the Mediterranean coastal wildlife tourism (Güzel, 2012). In addition, one of the most important challenges that must be highlighted is the high risk of earthquakes and other possible disasters in Türkiye due to its geographical characteristics. Table 6 highlights the natural disaster risks and their impact on Türkiye's tourism.

Table 6. Possible Impacts of Natural Disasters on Türkiye's Tourism

Disaster Type	Affected Tourism Types	Impact Area
Earthquake	Cultural heritage, city tourism	Istanbul, Izmir, Hatay
Wildfire	Coastal tourism, ecotourism	Antalya, Muğla
Flood	City, nature, cultural heritage	Black Sea Region
Drought	Thermal, agriculture, nature, heritage	Central Anatolia, Pamukkale
Storm/tornado	Sea and coastal tourism	Mediterranean coast
Landslide	Eco-tourism, nature, trekking tourism	Black Sea Region

Source: (Created by researchers)

All these highlight the need for strategic adaptation and policy interventions to mitigate these effects. Corroborating with this, Asmelash and Kumar (2019) underline the need of sustainably

managing heritage tourism, to not only inspire nostalgia and romanticize the past but also to solve global concerns including climate change, advances in technology, and social exclusion. Therefore, an integrated management approaches involving collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and local communities can enhance Turkish heritage site conservation. In addition, enhancing local engagement through community-led tourism initiatives and encouraging local entrepreneurship in heritage tourism can ensure equitable benefits and promote local ownership of heritage resources.

On the other hand, effective governance and coordination between stakeholders would be strengthened to better support the preservation and sustainable development of Türkiye's heritage (Human, 2015). Governance reflects a more comprehensive concept, including destination management, representation, planning, monitoring, and capacity building, all of which are crucial for the sustainable development of heritage tourism. However, the term "effective governance" in heritage tourism implies not just policies and legal systems but also ensuring all stakeholders' participation—including local communities, government agencies, and private sector actors (Yildirim, 2024). In this regard, stakeholder conflicts also present a main challenge as various interest groups—including local communities along with government agencies, tourism businesses, and NGOs—usually hold different priorities (Garrod & Fyall, 2000). The economic impact of increased tourism revenue supports local communities, but cultural heritage might lose its intrinsic value when tourism exceeds reasonable levels (Cohen, 1988). Heritage sites often encounter a lack of adequate funding and investment because they need major upkeep costs, yet receive insufficient funding because of budget limitations or over-reliance on tourism revenue (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002). Türkiye has recently introduced tourism taxes as part of its broader efforts to regulate and improve tourism sustainability. Although the revenue is being deposited into the general budget and is not fully earmarked for addressing tourist-related externalities, this strategy implies increasing institutional awareness of the necessity of sustainable tourism funding mechanisms. In this context, the qualitative data analysis revealed that the participants emphasized the importance of effective management, sustainable financing, and transforming tourism revenue into region-based investments. For example, **P1** mentioned:

> *"A proper financial management model, which can be governed through collective decision-making, should be established; this model can be implemented via local foundations and associations, [...] in this way, the tourism revenue generated can be converted into regional investments that generate income and protect the resource itself.*

Finally, issues such as the reuse of historic mansions and houses as hotels, the protection of crafts traditions, and the organization of local festivals also play crucial roles in preserving heritage. However, it is not enough for local governments or the central government to assume this responsibility alone (Arslan Kalay & Yenişehirlioğlu, 2017), and the community should be involved. Hence, involving OIC collaboration and international organizations like UNESCO in these processes should assist in establishing a more integrated approach and efficient management system that supports local development while safeguarding the unique cultural heritage of Türkiye.

Table 7. SWOT-Heritage Tourism in Türkiye

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Extensive cultural and natural heritage assets	- Heavy reliance on coastal/mass tourism
- Strong institutional framework	- Underfunded local heritage conservation and management
- Nationwide tourism infrastructure	- Uneven capacity and tourism service quality across regions
- Broad digital outreach	- Limited monitoring, enforcement, and audit mechanisms for sustainability
- Strong policy tools	- Risks of commercialization, and gentrification in urban heritage areas

Opportunities	Threats
- Expanding niche segments	- Urbanization, mining, and agriculture pressures on heritage zones
- Use of smart technologies for site management, monitoring and education	- Climate change and natural disasters affecting heritage sites
- Increased domestic and international heritage awareness	- Over-tourism and commercial exploitation
- Stronger international partnerships	- Coordination gaps between national and local governance levels
- Rising creative industries & reuse of traditional architecture	

Considering Türkiye has been historically challenged also by many tourism industry issues including high seasonality, low occupancy rates, short average length of stay, high reliance on foreign tour operators, lack of qualified human resources, inadequate marketing strategies, and a high percentage of lower-income tourists in the past, the Turkish tourism industry has also shown remarkable success with the contribution of alternative tourism particularly heritage travelers. Heritage tourism demand is all year round, with a longer length of stay. A higher percentage of heritage tourists travel independently rather than relying on tour operators, which also decreases overreliance on tour operators. They are less price sensitive with a higher spending per capita as well, which also makes heritage tourists an attractive segment who would contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Türkiye's primary strength lies in its rich cultural, historical, and natural heritage that spans thousands of years—from Göbeklitepe to Topkapı Palace. This legacy has earned the country global recognition, including 40 World Heritage assets listed by UNESCO. Türkiye's tourism strategy has also evolved significantly through key instruments like the *Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023*, the *Sustainable Tourism Program (TR-I)*, and the national *Development Plans*. These are supported by the proactive role of the *Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA)* in branding, digital promotion, and the 'GoTürkiye' portal, visited by millions monthly. Furthermore, Türkiye's strong infrastructure—including high-speed railways, expanded airports, and e-ticketing systems—enables effective visitor flow and distribution. Digitally enabled platforms such as virtual museums and dynamic marketing videos contribute significantly to site promotion and cultural education.

Despite this strong foundation, Türkiye still struggles with several internal weaknesses. The dominance of coastal/mass tourism in its tourism mix continues to dilute the visibility and

preservation efforts of inland heritage destinations. Additionally, while infrastructure exists, it remains uneven—particularly in rural areas where service quality and local capacities are inadequate. Although policy and audit tools like Environmental Impact Assessments (CED) are mandated, their implementation and monitoring are inconsistent. The commercialization of cultural assets often leads to the erosion of authenticity, especially in urban centers like Istanbul. Gentrification and the displacement of local communities due to uncontrolled development pose additional concerns.

Türkiye has considerable potential to diversify its heritage tourism offerings. Niche segments such as faith tourism (e.g., Konya, Şanlıurfa), gastronomy tourism, and rural tourism hold the key to promoting lesser-known destinations and easing pressure on overcrowded cities. Restoration and adaptive reuse of traditional assets—such as caravanserais, historical mansions, and traditional villages—can support the creation of additional heritage circuits and tourism corridors that complement and enhance the cultural routes already featured on the GoTurkey platform. Furthermore, Türkiye has begun embracing digital innovation—like AI-supported visitor systems, virtual reality tours, and smart heritage mapping—into its tourism strategy. These tools can be scaled up to improve site protection, risk forecasting, and visitor satisfaction. Finally, international partnerships (e.g., UNESCO, CulturEU), combined with Türkiye's strong cultural diplomacy with OIC countries, present avenues for both funding and knowledge exchange.

Several external and sector-wide threats challenge the sustainability of Türkiye's heritage tourism. Rapid urbanization, agricultural pressures, and mining operations pose serious risks to both tangible and intangible heritage, especially in rural or ecologically sensitive zones. Moreover, climate change and natural disasters such as earthquakes, wildfires or floods are increasingly affecting archaeological and historical sites. Coordination challenges between ministries, municipalities, and local actors often lead to fragmented planning and policy enforcement. Meanwhile, increased visitor pressure—especially during peak months—can degrade heritage assets. The commercial overuse of cultural identity for profit without community involvement is another major risk, leading to loss of authenticity, resident displacement, and negative tourist experiences. In this context, as per qualitative data analysis, participants highlighted the importance of addressing gaps in the Volume-to-Value Tourism approach, emphasizing the need to shift from mass tourism strategies toward more sustainable, high-value tourism practices that benefit local communities and preserve cultural heritage. For example, **P1** surmised: *"Focusing constantly on visitor numbers is, in itself, a handicap. We evaluate tourist activity in terms of quantity, whereas it would be much more logical to assess it in terms of quality."*

Table 8 identifies key barriers to the economic sustainability of heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The most pressing challenge is *limited access to investment and funding* (M = 4.09), highlighting the financial constraints faced in preserving and developing heritage sites. This is followed by concerns over the *unequal distribution of tourism benefits* (M = 4.05), indicating that economic gains from heritage tourism are not equitably shared among stakeholders, particularly local communities*. Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand* (M = 3.79) also pose a barrier, reflecting the vulnerability of heritage tourism to off-peak periods. Lastly, the *leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies* (M = 3.57) suggests that a portion of the economic benefits generated does not remain within the local economy. These findings underscore the need for improved financial support mechanisms, equitable benefit-sharing strategies, and policies to enhance local economic retention in Türkiye's heritage tourism sector.

Table 8. What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?

Key barriers	M
Limited access to investment and funding.	4,09
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.	4,05
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.	3,79
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.	3,57

Table 9 highlights the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The most significant challenge is weak enforcement of regulations (M = 3.91), indicating concerns about the ineffective application of existing policies. This is followed by a lack of funding for conservation (M = 3.82), reflecting financial constraints in preserving heritage sites. Over-tourism and overcrowding (M = 3.61) also emerge as notable issues, particularly in popular destinations where visitor pressure threatens site integrity. Additionally, lack of awareness among tourists (M = 3.55) points to the need for improved education and communication about responsible visitor behavior. Lastly, climate change and environmental degradation (M = 3.39) are perceived as growing threats, although rated slightly lower than institutional and behavioral challenges. Overall, the findings suggest that sustainability in heritage tourism is primarily hindered by governance shortcomings, financial limitations, and inadequate visitor awareness.

Table 9. What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?

Biggest barriers	M
Weak enforcement of regulations.	3,91
Lack of funding for conservation.	3,82
Over-tourism and overcrowding.	3,61
Lack of awareness among tourists.	3,55
Climate change and environmental degradation.	3,39

4.1.5. Success Factors for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Türkiye

The heritage tourism development in Türkiye is based on various social, structural, organizational, promotional, financial and strategic factors and actions which integrate sustainability principles. These are explored further below:

- ✓ ***Türkiye's Strategic Approach in Managing Sustainable Heritage Tourism***

Thanks to its strategic geographic location, Türkiye is home to a wealth of natural resources and has served as the cradle of numerous civilizations, transforming its major cities into key cultural and commercial centers. These destinations continue to hold an important place in collective memory, as they preserve their cultural richness while sustaining vital social and economic functions (Arslan, 2015). Recognizing this potential, as mentioned earlier, Türkiye has prioritized integrating heritage into its broader tourism development strategy. A major institutional step in this direction was the re-merging of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism in 2003, forming the TMoCT. This merger allowed for a more coordinated and holistic approach to heritage tourism, aligning cultural preservation with tourism policy and strategic development.

The Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023, launched in 2007 and aligned with the country's five-year development plans, also adopted a strategic planning approach to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector. Rather than promoting the country as a whole, the strategy emphasized the branding and promotion of micro-destinations, allowing for more targeted marketing and product differentiation. It introduced thematic products and

destinations, including nine tourism development regions (e.g., Phrygia, Troy, Cappadocia), seven thematic tourism corridors (such as the Faith Tourism Route and Silk Road), ten specialized tourism cities, and five eco-tourism zones. In the qualitative data analysis, some participants highlighted Place-Based Tourism Innovation as a key factor in Türkiye's successful heritage tourism management, particularly emphasizing its role in the development of Thematic Tourism Routes. For example, **P4**:

> *"All institutions operating in tourism marketing in Türkiye—government and tour operators—are striving to implement place-based communication. In other words, you're transforming local cultural heritage into an experience package. For example, tourists visiting Cappadocia can experience the local culture through activities like horseback riding, hot air ballooning, or attending a pottery workshop, thus buying the overall experience package."*

This place-based model aimed to combine national cultural heritage, historic landmarks, and natural assets with local economic development and environmental sustainability. While the strategy brought tangible improvements in visitor experiences, heritage protection, and regional tourism diversification, it has yet to reach its full potential due to limitations in infrastructure, implementation, promotional reach, and environmental pressures on heritage sites. Nevertheless, the integrated approach contributed significantly to regional development and national identity-building and laid the groundwork for post-2023 tourism planning. In 2024 alone, Türkiye welcomed 62.2 million visitors, generated $61.1 billion in tourism revenue, and recorded an average expenditure of $972 per visitor (TMoCT, 2025a).

✓ ***Structures and Legislation to Promote and Develop Sustainable Heritage Tourism***

Türkiye's commitment to sustainable heritage tourism is firmly grounded in a comprehensive legislative framework that governs the protection of its cultural and natural resources. Over the years, various national laws and regulations have been enacted to safeguard heritage sites from environmental degradation, uncontrolled urbanization, and the adverse effects of mass tourism. These legal measures establish clear guidelines for conservation, promote responsible development practices, and ensure that tourism activities are aligned with long-term sustainability objectives.

A central tool within this framework is the Environmental Impact Assessment (CED), which is mandatory for all significant infrastructure and tourism-related projects. CED functions as a strategic planning and decision-making instrument that evaluates the potential environmental and social impacts of all large-scale projects and investments. It also requires the exploration of alternative approaches and prescribes mitigation strategies to reduce harm to ecosystems and heritage assets. This process ensures that any development including tourism investments does not compromise the ecological, social and cultural integrity of the destinations involved.

Building on this regulatory base, Türkiye has adopted numerous sustainability certifications and environmental quality standards to raise the accountability of tourism operators. Certifications such as ISO 9001, Green Globe, Blue Flag, Orange Circle, and the Selluka Certificate and Plaque reflect the tourism sector's alignment with both national and international standards for environmental protection, service quality, and cultural sensitivity. Within this scope, one of the studies carried out to create a sustainable tourism policy in Türkiye is the environmentally friendly Blue Flag Program. Blue Flag is an international environmental program that brings together the tourism and environmental sectors in local, nationa,l and international dimensions, provides a sustainable development in the areas of high water quality, safety standards, environmental management and environmental education standards on the coast, and plays an

important role in the protection of the coastal and marine ecosystem. The beach and the coast are the only eco-labels and the indispensable brand and marketing element of the tourism sector. Studies continue to preserve environmental quality within the framework of the conservation-use balance and to ensure the annual increase in the number of beaches meeting the standards required to be awarded the Blue Flag. In 2025, a total of 577 beaches, 29 marinas, 8 private yachts, and 18 tourism vessels qualified to receive the Blue Flag. Among the 50 FEE member countries implementing the Blue Flag program internationally, Turkey ranks third in the number of Blue Flag beaches (577), following Spain and Greece. The rapid growth of the tourism market and its significant importance to national economies make the Blue Flag Program, an international eco-label, highly significant. In this context, the increase in our number of Blue Flags demonstrates our country's commitment to public health and environmental protection, while providing a competitive advantage over rival countries and contributing to a higher ranking in the global standings. In 2024, Türkiye also launched the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program (TR-I) to institutionalize environmentally responsible and inclusive tourism practices in the lodging industry. Grounded in the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria, the program promotes climate-aware planning, sustainable business models, and the development of low-impact tourism infrastructure. A key objective is to mitigate the effects of climate change on tourism and cultural heritage through enhanced risk management, adaptive conservation measures, and awareness campaigns targeting both service providers and tourists (TMoCT, 2024).

At the forefront of these efforts stands the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), which plays a critical role in mainstreaming sustainability across the tourism sector. TGA established as a semi-autonomous, public-private-partnership organization, is responsible not only for promoting Türkiye globally but also for implementing the Sustainable Tourism Certification system, organizing sector-wide trainings, and fostering sustainable branding and marketing strategies. One of TGA's innovative tools is the Tourism Contribution Taxation System, which collects tourism-related levies from accommodation providers and travel agencies. The revenue generated is allocated to the promotion of Türkiye's tourism, the discovery and preservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage, and the execution of short-, medium-, and long-term communication campaigns (TGA, 2025c). The qualitative data revealed that TGA is one of the most important indicators of the Turkish tourism industry in promoting and developing heritage tourism in Türkiye. In this regard, **P5** mentioned:

> *"In terms of structures and legislation to promote and develop sustainable heritage tourism, the role of local authorities is particularly important...In this context, the TGA has established Provincial Tourism Promotion and Development Platforms, a project that has been active for approximately 2–3 years. These platforms, created to develop and promote tourism across all 81 provinces, include councils comprising all relevant local stakeholders."*

Türkiye's dedication to sustainability is further reflected in its active partnership with UNESCO. Since ratifying the World Heritage Convention in 1983, the country has inscribed 21 sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List, submitted a substantial number of new registration applications, completed 51 State of Conservation reports, and received over $518,000 in international conservation funding. Türkiye has also served three times on the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, reinforcing its leadership in global heritage governance and advocacy (UNESCO, 2025). Hence, through a strong legislative base, rigorous environmental assessment mechanisms, forward-looking sustainability programs, and proactive institutional leadership, Türkiye has positioned itself as a regional model for the integration of sustainability, climate resilience, and cultural preservation within its tourism development agenda. The qualitative

data analysis showed that nearly all participants emphasized the importance of Transnational Cultural Heritage Partnerships' structures and legislation in promoting and developing sustainable heritage tourism. In this regard, one of the participants noted the ongoing efforts of the Turkish government to establish transnational partnerships for heritage tourism routes:

> *"In the field of Cultural Heritage, there are cultural routes established by the European Commission and the EPA. Efforts are ongoing to identify key heritage areas in our country [Türkiye] and integrate prominent local routes into these international route networks. Collaborative routes with partner countries are also being developed—for example, in the wine sector, initiatives like joint participation in the WSET [Wine & Spirit Education Trust] and similar projects are underway."* (**P4**)

✓ ***Diversification in Heritage Tourism:***

One of the significant strengths of Türkiye's heritage tourism growth is the diversification of its tourism products and experiences, expanding beyond mainstream cultural and natural heritage offerings. In addition to prominent attractions such as Ephesus, Topkapı Palace, or Cappadocia, Türkiye has strategically invested in niche segments of heritage tourism that cater to evolving traveler motivations. For instance, industrial heritage tourism is promoted through destinations like Zonguldak (coal mining heritage), Eskişehir (railway history), and Cumalıkızık (a living example of Ottoman village architecture, and a UNESCO site). War and dark tourism are developed in Çanakkale (site of the Gallipoli Campaign) and Anıtkabir (mausoleum of Atatürk), while faith-based tourism is promoted by spiritual destinations such as Konya (home to Rumi and the Mevlevi tradition), Hacıbektaş (center of the Bektashi Order), and Şanlıurfa, known as the "City of Prophets."

Beyond thematic diversification, gastronomy tourism is becoming an integral component of heritage experiences. Culinary heritage not only appeals to a dedicated segment of gastronomy tourists—particularly from OIC member countries—but also serves as a complementary product enriching broader tourist experience. With the efforts of TGA, various restaurants in the country also made it to the Michelin List. In parallel, product development initiatives have revitalized historic spaces such as caravanserais, old mansions, and even abandoned mines, integrating them into the tourism economy through creative reuse and adaptive heritage conservation models. According to the qualitative data analysis, participants particularly emphasized the importance of gastronomy in establishing a Culinary Destination Identity as a component of heritage as soft power. For example, **P1**: *"Gastronomy is one of the forms of intangible cultural heritage. Today, it has become particularly important in the creation of brand cities."*

Türkiye has also made significant advances in destination development by promoting local tourism centers and micro-regions. The Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023 introduced a regional planning approach that established nine tourism development regions, seven thematic tourism corridors (such as the Faith Tourism Route and the Olive Corridor), ten designated tourism cities, and five eco-tourism regions. These initiatives not only enhance regional visibility and identity but also distribute tourism more evenly, thereby reducing pressure on traditional hotspots in already popular destinations, supporting a more balanced development and sustainable growth.

One of the most impactful efforts in this diversification process has been the intensive focus on archaeological excavations and heritage recovery. As of 2024, thousands of archaeological excavations are actively underway, contributing to the discovery, conservation, and presentation of cultural assets. Recent successful heritage destinations such as the Göbeklitepe

exemplify Türkiye's commitment to destination-specific development rooted in cultural heritage. These projects serve as models for integrating archaeological, historical, and community-based resources into visitor experiences. TMoCT, through its General Directorate of Cultural Assets and Museums, oversees a vast network of 215 state-run museums and 148 organized archaeological sites open to the public. Moreover, Türkiye has undertaken significant efforts to repatriate cultural assets from abroad, reinforcing national identity and enriching museum collections. Through this multifaceted diversification strategy, Türkiye not only strengthens its appeal across a wide spectrum of traveler interests but also reinforces its position as a globally competitive, sustainable, and culturally rich heritage tourism destination.

✓ ***Visitor Management in Heritage Attractions:***

A core component of Türkiye's success in heritage tourism is its comprehensive and adaptive visitor management strategy, which effectively balances preservation with accessibility. In an era of rapidly evolving tourist preferences, Türkiye has embraced digital innovation, strategic infrastructure development, and human-centered service delivery to ensure a high-quality and sustainable heritage tourism experience.

Concerning infrastructure investments and renovations, the TMoCT has significantly improved the physical accessibility, safety, and visitor facilities at major heritage sites. These enhancements are accompanied by extended visiting hours at key museums and archaeological areas, which helps reduce peak-hour congestion and improves the overall visitor flow. Information provision has also been prioritized through the development of interpretative signage, multilingual digital guides, and on-site visitor services that enrich cultural understanding.

In line with its digital transformation agenda, Türkiye has implemented a range of technological tools, including digital museum cards, online ticketing systems, and virtual museum platforms—of which there are currently 59—to both facilitate access and manage visitor volumes more efficiently (TMoCT, 2025c). The official tourism portal "Go Türkiye", managed by the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA), draws tens of millions of visits per month, using personalized content and data-driven marketing to direct tourist demand toward lesser-known destinations, thereby helping to manage pressure on major heritage sites.

These marketing efforts are strategically aligned with visitor nudging techniques, whereby promotional campaigns are used not only to attract visitors but also to disperse them seasonally and geographically, promoting sustainable behaviors and enhancing regional tourism benefits. Complementing these digital and promotional strategies is the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program, which provides a framework for quality assurance, infrastructure design, and climate-conscious site management in accordance with international GSTC standards. As of September 1, 2025, a total of 19,510 accommodation facilities have obtained certification/verification under the Türkiye Sustainable Tourism Program. Of these, 2,005 facilities have received the Third Stage GSTC Certification, 4,198 facilities the Second Stage Verification, and 13,307 facilities the First Stage Verification.

Human capital remains a cornerstone of successful visitor management. Türkiye's tourism workforce—particularly its licensed professional tourist guides—plays a vital role in shaping responsible tourist behavior while delivering culturally rich and informative experiences. Currently, 13,627 professional guides are certified in Türkiye, with 9,982 actively working in the field (TUREB, 2025). Their deep cultural knowledge, ethical professionalism, and social awareness contribute significantly to the quality of heritage site interpretation and sustainable tourism activity. Supporting this is Türkiye's tourism education ecosystem, which includes 30

university departments focused on tourist guiding, 36 faculties of tourism, vocational schools, and distance learning programs. These institutions emphasize practical skill development, environmental consciousness, and interdisciplinary training to align workforce competencies with global sustainability trends. Together, these measures reflect Türkiye's commitment to an integrated and future-focused approach to visitor management—one that combines technology, infrastructure, education, and marketing to not only protect cultural heritage but also create a more inclusive, efficient, and meaningful tourism experience. The qualitative data analysis revealed that Cultural Heritage Literacy is crucial for community-based tourism. For example, one of the participants highlighted this topic as follows:

> *"From tour guides to all employees working in the sector, it is essential that they acquire the necessary heritage tourism literacy. I believe that the fundamental aspect of this process is structuring tourism education to prioritize cultural heritage and to convey the importance of sustainability in this context. [...] Ensuring the continuous integration of tourism into investments, public programs, and community-based initiatives has been a key factor in the success of heritage tourism in Türkiye." **(P4)***

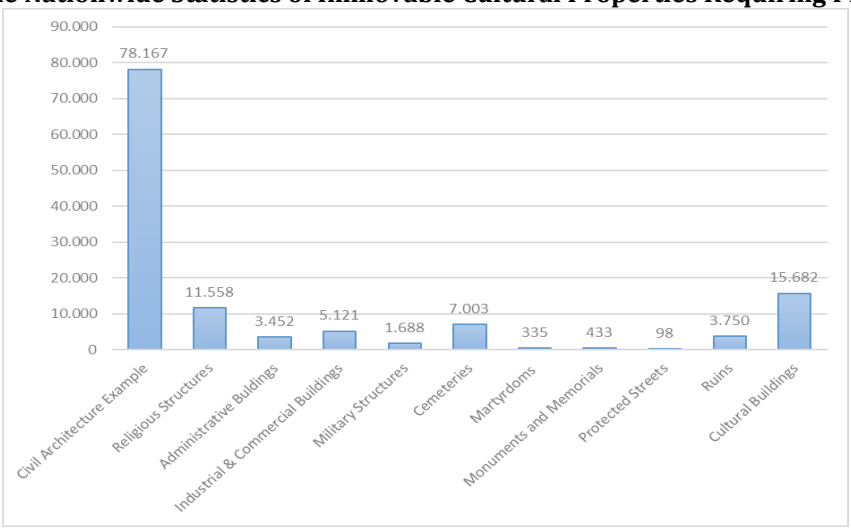
- ✓ ***Funding of Sustainable Heritage Tourism***

A vital component of advancing sustainable heritage tourism in Türkiye is the strategic mobilization of financial resources, including public funding, tax mechanisms, and private sector engagement, to support the protection, development, and promotion of cultural assets. Recognizing the crucial role of financing in heritage conservation, the TMoCT has introduced a variety of support instruments, complemented by fiscal incentives and institutional subsidies, to ensure the long-term viability of its rich heritage landscape.

One of the flagship programs, the "Intangible Cultural Heritage Bearer" initiative, exemplifies how targeted funding is used to identify and sustain traditional cultural expressions—such as folk poetry, decorative arts, and artisanal crafts—by connecting them to the tourism economy, particularly through the development of souvenir shops and culturally themed gift stores. In addition, registered artists receive official recognition and support through the Folk Culture Information and Documentation Center, where they are listed and issued special identity cards to elevate their visibility in the sector.

Simultaneously, the Folk Culture Program allocates funding to research, documentation, thematic projects, cultural education, scientific meetings, and research, helping to keep Türkiye's intangible heritage alive and publicly accessible. Beyond these efforts, archaeological excavations and surface surveys continue to receive national and international funding, enriching Türkiye's growing inventory of protected sites. As of 2024, there are more than 150.000 heritage assets officially listed across the country as "Türkiye-wide Immovable Cultural Properties to be Protected," each requiring funding for restoration, maintenance, and visitor infrastructure.

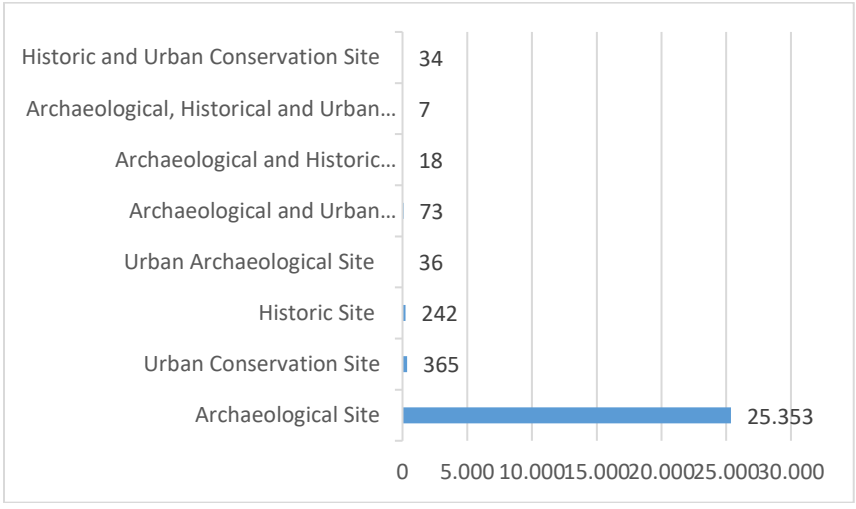
Figure 9. The Nationwide Statistics of Immovable Cultural Properties Requiring Protection



Source: (TMoCT, 2024b)

In addition to Nationwide Statistics of Immovable Cultural Properties Requiring Protection, there are many archaeological sites across Türkiye.

Figure 10. Protected Sites Across Türkiye (2024)



Source: (TMoCT, 2024b)

To sustain the financial ecosystem surrounding heritage sites, Türkiye has introduced a variety of tax and pricing mechanisms as well. These include tax incentives for cultural heritage organizations, increased museum and site ticket prices, and revenue generation from on-site gift shops, which not only support preservation costs but also provide income for local artisans and communities. Sponsorship agreements with private sector entities further complement state support, allowing for restoration, branding, and the enhancement of visitor experiences through collaborative models. In addition, the state provides energy and human resources subsidies, particularly for cultural institutions and museums that meet environmental and employment standards. Support also extends to land and office allocations for non-profit cultural organizations and tourism cooperatives, helping to reduce their operational burdens and encourage local engagement with heritage.

However, the qualitative analysis revealed that most participants highlighted the absence of a site-based funding system, as tourism tax revenues are directed straight to the general government budget. In this regard, **P5** mentioned: *"Taxes from tourism revenues go to Türkiye's general budget. Unfortunately, due to the improper distribution of destination-based revenue, the location where the revenue is generated is not directly supported in the economic cycle, although it pays the costs associated with tourism activity."*

On the international front, Türkiye has been highly proactive in securing global heritage funding. As a long-standing party to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, Türkiye has not only registered 21 sites on the World Heritage List but has also received over $518,000 in UNESCO international funding for approved heritage projects, in addition to submitting 51 conservation reports and holding three mandates on the World Heritage Committee. These domestic and international funding streams are coordinated through a structured framework involving the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums, which monitors expenditures, supervises project implementation, and aligns resource use with national cultural policy priorities. Figure 10 provides a detailed visualization of the distribution of Türkiye's protected cultural assets, reinforcing the scale and geographic reach of funding needs across provinces. Hence, Türkiye's approach to heritage tourism funding is distinguished by its multi-channel financial architecture—a blend of state investment, tax policy, public-private partnerships, and international cooperation—that underpins its ability to preserve cultural heritage while promoting sustainable tourism development at both the national and local levels.

✓ ***Community Involvement & Capacity Building Initiatives in Heritage Tourism:***

Another feature of Türkiye's sustainable heritage tourism approach is its strong emphasis on community involvement and capacity building, designed to cultivate local ownership, elevate cultural awareness, and foster long-term engagement with heritage resources. These efforts not only contribute to the protection and promotion of Türkiye's diverse cultural assets but also strengthen heritage as a powerful source of pride, identity, and social interaction for citizens.

One of the central instruments for participatory governance in this domain is the Tourism Councils established by the TMoCT. These councils act as multi-stakeholder platforms where representatives from public institutions, the private sector, NGOs, and academia come together to assess the tourism industry and shape responsive and future-proof strategies (TMoCT, 2025f). Their work has contributed to aligning heritage policies with global developments while reflecting local needs and aspirations. These consultative structures have also encouraged increased engagement by the private sector and civil society, leading to a growing number of restoration projects, festivals, and promotional campaigns supported by private sponsors and NGOs. In turn, this has created an environment in which heritage is not only preserved but also actively celebrated as a dynamic and evolving component of everyday life.

Education and awareness raising are key components of this cultural empowerment. Through training programs, cultural education workshops, and outreach activities, communities are equipped with the knowledge and tools to understand, care for, and promote their heritage. These programs help instill a sense of stewardship and pride in cultural traditions, local stories, and historical places—reinforcing the emotional connection between people and the places they live. Another tool used for this engagement is the Museum Card, which provides Turkish citizens with unlimited access to state-run museums and archaeological sites at significantly reduced rates. This price differentiation policy ensures inclusivity and accessibility, enabling more citizens to engage with their history and cultural identity. It has become a vehicle for deepening historical consciousness, strengthening national identity, and turning heritage into a living source of pride and belonging (TMoCT, 2025d).

Digital platforms such as the Türkiye Culture Portal enhance this connection by making cultural knowledge widely accessible, displaying everything from monuments and historical sites to local arts and folk traditions. Meanwhile, the Turkish Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) promotes cultural diversity through marketing campaigns on faith tourism, gastronomy, dark tourism, and heritage routes, which not only generate market interest but also highlight the unique contributions of different regions and communities to the national cultural fabric.

In addition to these digital platforms, Müze Ulusal Enformasyon Sistemi (MUES), modeled on the principles of efficiency, capacity enhancement, and participation, is a national database that will store detailed information on artifacts under the protection of public and private museums in Turkey. It also serves as an institutional support system, a monitoring and planning tool that increases efficiency in museology, restoration, and anti-smuggling services. Thanks to this system, the work and processes in museums are transferred to an electronic environment, and the cultural heritage field is managed within the scope of e-Government services. The system functions as a research platform and educational tool for academics, researchers, students, and citizens.

The sub-components of MUES, which facilitate data and documentation-based rational decision-making processes, are the Inventory Module, Laboratory Module, Commission and Evaluation Module, Museums Information Module, Anti-Smuggling Module, and Private Museum and Collector Module. In this context, MUES represents an important step towards creating a digital twin of Turkey's cultural heritage and museum activities; it replicates real-world processes and integrates them into a compatible online system for digital operations, monitoring, and reporting.

Within the scope of the aforementioned project design and implementation processes, the Museum National Information System (MUES Project), which carries our cultural heritage into the digital age, received the “Best Digital Transformation Governance of the Year” award at the 2nd Corporate Governance Summit organized by the Corporate Governance Association in 2024. It was also awarded second place in the “Public-Digital Transformation Category” at the Productivity Project Awards organized by the Ministry of Trade in 2025.

Capacity building is further amplified through cultural events like the Turkish Culture Route Festival and Living Heritage Festivals, which provide platforms for traditional artists, artisans, and performers to share their crafts and narratives with both national and international audiences. These festivals are organized with the support of local governments, NGOs, and community organizations, fostering shared responsibility and collaborative heritage management. The participation of locals in workshops and exhibitions—ranging from decorative arts (marbling, miniature, hüsn-i hat, traditional calligraphy in Islamic art) to folk performances (Karagöz, storytelling, puppetry)—creates a collective sense of pride and intergenerational continuity.

Türkiye’s commitment to promoting intangible cultural heritage is also reflected in its global leadership—ranking second worldwide in the number of elements inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. This recognition is not only a diplomatic achievement but also a symbolic confirmation of national cultural pride, one that is shared with the public through online exhibitions, multilingual videos, and community-based awareness campaigns. Moreover, financial and institutional support is extended to municipalities, local administration unions, and cultural NGOs, enabling them to lead heritage initiatives at the regional level. Programs such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage Bearers and Practitioners of Intangible Cultural Heritage Identification Card and the Living Human Treasures National Inventory of Türkiye elevate local

custodians and tradition bearers and practitioners, ensuring that pride in heritage is not only symbolic but also economically and socially reinforced. Through these holistic and participatory efforts, Türkiye has positioned heritage not just as an asset to be conserved, but as a living, shared, and celebrated expression of national identity, a source of local pride, and a unifying force across generations and geographies.

Table 10 presents respondents' perceptions of the local economic benefits of heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The highest-rated item is the belief that *local businesses benefit financially from tourism* (M = 3.98), indicating strong agreement that heritage tourism supports the local economy. This is followed by the perception that *heritage tourism has created jobs in the community* (M = 3.84), highlighting its role in employment generation. Slightly lower, but still moderate, is the view that *tourism revenue is reinvested into community development* (M = 3.63), suggesting that while some economic returns support broader community goals, this may not be consistently or transparently implemented. Overall, the results reflect a generally positive perception of heritage tourism's economic contributions, particularly at the local business and employment levels.

Table 10. Perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism.

Economic benefits	**M**
Local businesses benefit financially from tourism.	3,98
Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community.	3,84
Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development.	3,63

4.1.6. Recommended Practices for Türkiye

While Türkiye has made substantial progress in integrating sustainability into its heritage tourism landscape—through strategic planning, institutional coordination, community engagement, and diversification of heritage tourism products—there remain areas that require enhanced attention to ensure long-term impact and resilience. As tourism demand continues to rise and external pressures such as climate change, urbanization, and globalization intensify, Türkiye needs to adopt forward-looking, inclusive, and adaptive policy measures. The following recommendations are grounded in the findings of this report and aim to guide policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners in further strengthening Türkiye's position as a leader in sustainable heritage tourism. Based on literature and international best practices as well as Türkiye's unique heritage context, several recommendations can enhance the quality and sustainability of heritage tourism in the country. By addressing these factors and implementing best practices, Türkiye can continue to leverage its vast heritage assets while ensuring their preservation and safeguarding for future generations. In this regard, to better understand the sustainability of Türkiye's heritage tourism from environmental, social, and economic perspectives, a deeper environmental analysis categorized under these three pillars of sustainability was utilized as per previous chapters and empirical data, as displayed in Table 11.

Table 11. SWOT Analysis - the summary of highlighted aspects

	Strengths
Environmental	The country's strategic geographical position enables the year-round development of cultural heritage tourism, enhancing its appeal across all seasons.
Social	Variety of alternative and thematic tourism (e.g., faith, darkness, gastronomy, industrial)

	A rich array of tangible and intangible heritage assets, supporting various forms of heritage tourism such as cultural, historical, architectural, and experiential tourism.
	Existence of social festivals (e.g., The Turkish Culture Route Festival and the Living Heritage Festivals) during all year.
	Existence of special programmes (e.g., the Living Human Treasures National Inventory of Türkiye) for raising heritage awareness.
	Existence of special programmes (e.g., the National Inventory of Living Human Treasures and folk culture) for raising heritage awareness.
	Adaptation to digital applications (e.g., Türkiye Culture Portal and Museum Card) and the existence of smart destination applications.
Economic	Having actively used commercial areas for centuries.
	Being one of the pioneer countries in the UNESCO World Heritage field (e.g., 21 UNESCO World Heritage sites) and being a candidate for new elements (e.g., 84 Candidate) on the list with many heritage assets.
	Existence of modern tourism businesses.
	Diversity of green transportation opportunities.
	Existence of strategic promotional and branding campaigns with leading government agencies (e.g. TGA and MoCT) in collaboration with NGOs.
	Variety of funds for local governments (e.g., municipalities, local administration unions and special provincial administrations) and associations/foundations whose main purpose is culture, art, tourism and promotional activities.
	The existence of programs in tourism education in leading universities' tourism faculties and open education faculties specific to heritage and cultural tourism.
	Weakness
Environmental	Inadequacy of quality visitor services (lack of materials, digital guides)
	Overtourism and destruction of cultural sites (e.g. Cappadocia, Pamukkale)
	Inaduaquate enforcement of regulations.
Social	Insufficient investment in intangible cultural heritage.
	Limited administrative coordination (conflicts between local and national authorities).
Economic	Tourists' short stay duration and low per capita spending compared to the number of tourists.
	Insufficient restoration and maintenance support for heritage sites due to the allocation of tourism taxes collected to the general state budget.
	Opportunities
Environmental	Increased residents' participation in tourism and employment opportunities.
	Development of educated guides and tourism workforce (13,627 professional guides)
	Supporting cultural festivals, local products and artists.
Social	It is an important place in the collective memory of the residents of the destinations.
	Interest in heritage tourism is still vibrant worldwide.

Economic	Increasing international demand for heritage tourism in world tourism trends.
	Efforts to adapt to national and international strategies for sustainable tourism.
	Dissemination of digital tourism tools (online tickets, virtual museums, etc.)
	Threats
Environmental	Limited infrastructure and marketing that have not yet reached their full potential as well as climate change threats.
	Commodification of cultural heritage and loss of identity due to risk of gentrification.
	Damage to cultural values due to excessive commercialization.
	Imbalance in carrying capacity due to high rate of tourist flows.
	High possibility of agricultural pressures due to the history of Türkiye's agricultural society.
	High risk of natural disasters that can negatively impact the heritage areas.
Social	Rising over-tourism on heritage tourism destinations with various assets.
Economic	Lack of international promotion and competing collective destinations approaches.
	A limited portion of tourism revenues is channeled back into the T&H industry, hindering its sustainable development.

Based on the Environmental analysis the recommended strategies for successful heritage tourism development in Türkiye—which are shaped by various social, structural, organizational, promotional, financial, and strategic factors integrating sustainability principles—are presented in detail below:

✓ ***Establish Structures for Enforcement & Implementation:***

While Türkiye has made significant progress in heritage tourism through strategic planning—especially via its Five-Year Development Plans and the Türkiye Tourism Strategy 2023—the next critical step is to consolidate these efforts through enforcement mechanisms that ensure consistent and accountable implementations. To move beyond planning into actionable governance, Türkiye must institutionalize enforcement structures that operationalize sustainability goals and integrate them into everyday tourism management at all levels. First, it is essential to ensure systematic follow-up of existing plans, strategies, and policy frameworks. Strategic documents such as the Tourism Strategy 2023 should have not only informed policy, but also be regularly monitored, updated, and enforced through clearly defined indicators and accountability structures. Therefore, the Tourism Strategy 2023 has to be updated and clearly set an establishment structure for enforcement and implementation. This will help align national objectives with regional realities, bridging the gap between vision and execution.

Secondly, Türkiye should expand the use of national and international sustainability certification systems, making them a mandatory or incentivized component of operating licenses for businesses in heritage zones. By encouraging certifications aligned with Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards or domestic equivalents, the state can reinforce quality, environmental, and social standards across the sector. Enforcement must be further strengthened through the regular and transparent auditing of heritage tourism operations. This includes developing independent audit bodies and incorporating private sector participation, ensuring that oversight is not only institutional but also cross-sectoral. Tourism enterprises,

especially those operating in or near heritage zones, should be subject to periodic sustainability assessments, which are linked to compliance incentives or penalties.

The use of digital technologies and AI-powered tools should be institutionalized as part of a modern monitoring infrastructure. Internet of Things (IoT) devices, AI algorithms, and geospatial data systems can be used to track visitor flows, monitor environmental impact, and detect risks in real time. These tools can be centrally integrated into a national heritage tourism data dashboard, enabling local authorities and ministries to intervene proactively and enforce sustainability criteria. Especially, in the context of digital transformation -as per qualitative data analysis- participants frequently underscored the importance of experiential marketing through digitally guided tours and global promotion through digital tools such as AI-supported VR and AR technologies. In this regard, **P6** mentioned: *"[...] In an experiential sense, artificial intelligence-supported VR and AR technological contents can make visits to cultural heritage sites more enjoyable for tourists of different age groups, especially young tourists."* Likewise, for the same topic, **P8** stated: *"[...] In particular, replacing promotional signage in tourist areas with AI-powered content like VR or AR will enhance the visitor experience through a digitally guided tour experience."*

To support this transition, targeted financial incentives—such as tax reductions, grants, or priority access to government support programs—should be provided to tourism businesses that demonstrate effective implementation of sustainability protocols, adopt smart technologies, or earn certified recognition. This would encourage the private sector to acknowledge sustainability not only as a regulatory burden but also as a strategic asset.

In sum, to safeguard the benefits of successful national heritage tourism strategies, Türkiye must now prioritize rigorous enforcement, real-time monitoring, and multi-actor collaboration, backed by smart tools and incentive systems. These structures will ensure that heritage tourism evolves not only as a culturally enriching and economically valuable sector but also as a model of institutional discipline and environmental stewardship.

- ✓ ***Governance, Coordination & Collaboration:***

Powerful and inclusive governance remains the cornerstone of sustainable heritage tourism. While Türkiye has made significant advancements through national strategies and cultural preservation programs, the multifaceted nature of heritage tourism demands a more coordinated, multi-level, and intersectoral governance approach. This approach must address not only tourism development but also the broader implications of environmental change, urban expansion, and sectoral activities such as industry, agriculture, and mining.

The conservation of Türkiye's cultural heritage is increasingly threatened by rapid urbanization, unsustainable agricultural techniques, aggressive mining operations, and tourism-related construction that threaten protected landscapes such as national parks, biosphere reserves, forests, coasts, and mountain regions. These activities place pressure on natural heritage sites, disrupt traditional lifestyles, and in many cases lead to the irreversible destruction of historical monuments. For instance, intensive farming practices may degrade the ecosystem balance of rural areas, while industrial developments often compromise both ecological and cultural values. Similarly, tourism infrastructure projects—particularly in ecologically sensitive areas—transform landscapes and impose unsustainable burdens on sites of historical and cultural significance. These risks also persist in Türkiye, and thus, a governance approach that is rooted in sustainable development principles and aligned with environmental ethics must be strengthened.

A key priority in this context is the enhancement of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), which should be empowered with legal authority, institutional capacity, and access to reliable data to plan, monitor, and implement tourism strategies at regional and local levels. Their mandates must be clearly aligned with those of national ministries, municipalities, and tourism unions to prevent jurisdictional overlaps and improve efficiency in policy implementation. In parallel, governance must institutionalize a centralized coordination mechanism involving the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Environment Urbanization and Climate Change, the Ministry of Development, and relevant public agencies. Such a platform would foster close cooperation with local governments, civil society, and professional tourism associations to ensure shared responsibility and transparent, inclusive decision-making. According to qualitative analysis, more than half of the participants strongly emphasized that events collaboratively organized by all stakeholders, serving as catalysts for heritage exposure, would be highly effective in promoting and preserving the heritage sites. In this regard, **P5** mentioned:

> *"For example, in the 1980s, hardly anyone knew about the kebab called Cağ Kebabı [a traditional horizontally roasted lamb kebab from Erzurum] in Erzurum; it was something unique to that region. Now, it has even spread to Europe. There is only one reason for this: during the Winter Olympics held in Erzurum, many artists came and tasted Cağ Kebabı."*

Harmonizing tourism policy with other sectors—particularly agriculture, industrial development, and land use planning—is also essential. In this regard, organic and traditional farming methods should be promoted to maintain the authenticity of cultural landscapes, while urban development and mining operations should be relocated away from heritage zones and required to adopt environmentally responsible technologies. Equally, tourism developments near protected areas, especially in coastal regions, must transform into sustainable initiatives guided by joint policy frameworks that prioritize long-term ecological and cultural conservation.

Türkiye must also develop comprehensive risk and crisis management strategies to address challenges posed by climate change, overtourism, natural disasters, and urban expansion. Modern technologies such as 3D mapping, sensor systems, satellite surveillance, and photographic documentation can be employed to detect and respond to structural damage, weather impacts, or environmental pressures. These tools can greatly enhance the effectiveness of governance by enabling real-time monitoring and early warning systems. AI-powered destination management systems can also be used to regulate tourist flows, improve service quality, and ensure a timely response to emerging threats.

Equally important is the participation of local communities in governance structures. Initiatives such as heritage tourism assemblies or community consultation boards must be institutionalized to include local voices—particularly artisans, small businesses, bearers and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage—in tourism planning. Preventing gentrification and protecting residents from displacement must remain a top priority in all development decisions. In this context, public-private partnerships should be facilitated, particularly those committed to conservation, education, and innovation in visitor experiences, provided they align with cultural sustainability principles.

Finally, Türkiye must continue its engagement with international institutions such as UNESCO, ICOMOS, UNWTO, WTO, and relevant environmental networks. Global challenges like climate change and heritage protection cannot be confronted in isolation. They require international solidarity, policy alignment, and local-level adaptation strategies developed in collaboration with NGOs, civil society, and research institutions. Building stronger governance, coordination,

and collaboration mechanisms in Türkiye is essential not only to manage heritage tourism more effectively but also to safeguard it against environmental and social threats.

✓ ***Creating Awareness and Involvement among Private Sector, Tourists and Locals***

One of the cornerstones of sustainable heritage tourism is fostering deep and widespread awareness among all stakeholders—particularly the private sector, tourists, and local communities. In Türkiye, this process must go beyond passive outreach and evolve into a systematic, participatory, and economically empowering awareness-building strategy that emphasizes shared responsibility, cultural pride, and long-term commitment to preservation.

Türkiye's strong tradition of tourism and hospitality education provides a promising foundation for shaping future professionals who are not only technically skilled but also culturally aware and sustainability-minded. Especially, Türkiye's significant number of trained tour guides provides a significant competitive advantage. Qualitative data analysis revealed that a significant portion of participants indicated that guide accountability is a crucial element for the success of heritage tourism services. In this regard, for example, **P7** mentioned:

> *"The quality of the guide services that provide information to visitors is crucial for tourists to have a memorable tourism experience. The guide's competence and extensive knowledge of the region, combined with their ability to present authentic culture, will significantly impact tourist satisfaction."*

To amplify this potential, formal education curricula—from primary through higher education—should incorporate modules on heritage, sustainability, and cultural identity to build early awareness, stimulate civic responsibility, and foster a sense of belonging. In parallel, capacity building in digital competencies and smart tourism tools must be expanded to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving sector. Programs focusing on AI, IoT, blockchain, and robotics can prepare tourism professionals to promote and safeguard cultural heritage using modern and ethical approaches (Ozer et al., 2022; Sonuç & Süer, 2023). For instance, big data for strategic decision-making, robotics in smart museums, blockchain-based secure ticketing, and IoT-driven analytics can improve efficiency while enhancing visitor satisfaction and site protection.

Yet, awareness efforts must also be community-centered and inclusive. It is essential to foster heritage awareness among residents, not merely through tourism campaigns but through local engagement programs that communicate the intrinsic value of heritage and instill a shared sense of identity and pride. Local festivals, oral history projects, school competitions, and digital storytelling can strengthen community ownership of heritage and increase participation in its safeguarding and promotion. These awareness initiatives must be directly linked to local economic empowerment. Highlighting the role of cultural preservation in creating jobs, supporting local enterprises, and revitalizing traditional crafts will help build sustained community support. In this respect, minimizing over-commercialization and gentrification is crucial, as uncontrolled tourism development can displace communities, harm cultural authenticity, and damage heritage assets. Participatory planning processes led by local governments, involving NGOs and residents, can ensure that tourism development remains socially and culturally equitable. As Cohen and Cohen (2012) noted, when cultural values are reduced to economic commodities, the long-term sustainability of heritage is threatened.

To counter this, tax incentives, profit-sharing structures, and grant schemes can support social cooperatives and local initiatives, enabling them to lead tourism-related enterprises in ways that respect and preserve cultural identity. Entrepreneurship, franchising, and branding strategies, when aligned with cultural sustainability goals, can create jobs, reduce rural immigration, and promote inclusive growth (Cifci et al., 2024). In particular, increased funding for sustainable

tourism projects can support initiatives that leverage heritage for socioeconomic benefits, including artisan markets, gastronomy ventures, and local guiding associations. Furthermore, Türkiye's engagement in regional tourism partnerships, particularly with OIC countries, can offer mutual benefits. By creating platforms for knowledge exchange and collaborative heritage tourism projects, Türkiye can expand its international reach while strengthening shared cultural identity and economic solidarity (Islam, 2017). Such partnerships and international heritage corridors can improve service standards, capacity building, and destination branding while offering new models of participatory and faith-based tourism that resonate with shared values.

Türkiye's investment in virtual museums, digital archives, and promotional videos should be scaled up and enhanced through AI personalization, blockchain-secured content, and NFTs that can make heritage storytelling more interactive and meaningful (Stublić et al., 2023). Public capacity-building events and gamified campaigns addressing issues such as climate change, disaster risk, and heritage loss can effectively engage both locals and tourists in heritage protection (Bonacini & Giaccone, 2022). For the private sector, targeted training programs, sustainability certifications, and incentives must be reinforced to align business practices with cultural preservation. Tourism operators, hospitality organizations, and local businesses should be encouraged and recognized for contributing to community wellbeing, cultural education, and heritage integrity.

Therefore, building awareness in heritage tourism must be strategic, inclusive, and economically grounded. By linking cultural pride with entrepreneurship, enabling local participation, and leveraging digital tools, Türkiye can cultivate a well-informed and committed network of stakeholders. This collective awareness will not only protect Türkiye's heritage but also position it as a regional leader in sustainable, socially inclusive, and culturally enriched tourism development.

- ✓ ***Visitor Services and Management***

Effective visitor services and management are central to sustaining the cultural, environmental, and economic value of heritage tourism. Türkiye's reliance on mass tourism has, at times, contributed to the commercialization of heritage sites, risking damage in their historical and cultural authenticity (Smith, 2016). To reverse this trend, a transformative approach to visitor management is required—one that shifts from high-volume tourism to value-driven, culturally immersive experiences. To achieve this, Türkiye's promotion as a heritage destination must go beyond branding. It should emphasize cultural depth, historical identity, and authenticity, encouraging travelers to explore the richness of local traditions, archaeological resources, and intangible cultural heritage (Öter, 2010). Promoting traditional crafts, especially in rural areas, not only supports local economies but also helps mitigate the negative effects of commercialization on heritage identity (Breathnach, 2006).

Visitor flow could be regulated through smart infrastructure and digital transformation. The implementation of AI-powered visitor management systems, online ticketing platforms, mobile travel applications, real-time crowd monitoring, digital touring (QR-coded routes, interactive maps), and personalized AI travel planning tools can ensure more balanced visitor distribution and enhanced site carrying capacity management (Cirulis et al., 2015). These technologies also allow for better demand forecasting, dynamic pricing, and queue management, especially during peak travel seasons. Moreover, complementary infrastructure such as well-maintained sanitation facilities, safety systems, multilingual signage, and environmentally friendly amenities must be prioritized to support comfort and inclusivity. These investments are especially important in rural and heritage-intensive destinations, where infrastructure gaps can hinder visitor experience and site sustainability.

Türkiye's recent innovation in extending night-time visiting hours at key cultural sites—such as Ephesus, Aspendos, and Galata Tower—represents a positive step toward decongesting daytime traffic and extending the tourist experience into cooler evening hours. This model should be expanded to more locations and further integrated into marketing partnerships with institutions like Turkish Airlines, creating thematic heritage experiences that support both local engagement and international branding (Turkish Airlines Blog, 2024). To offer high-quality experiences, it is equally critical to strengthen visitor information and guiding services. This includes both in-person interpretation by professional guides and digital content that supports self-guided learning through apps, audio guides, and augmented reality. Informational signage, orientation centers, and routing systems must be accessible, multilingual, and inclusive, ensuring every visitor can understand and engage meaningfully with the heritage on display. Additionally, virtual reality (VR), 3D mapping, and immersive simulations should be scaled up in diverse heritage settings to offer low-impact alternatives to in-person site visits during peak seasons, helping to preserve fragile sites and reduce carbon footprints (De La Plata et al., 2022; Petrova & Hristov, 2021).

In conclusion, visitor services and management in Türkiye must evolve toward an integrated, technology-assisted model that enhances experience quality, safeguards cultural assets, and supports local communities and economies. Through smart infrastructure, digital engagement, queue planning, and authentic interpretation, Türkiye can lead the way in making heritage tourism not only more sustainable but also more enriching, inclusive, and memorable.

- ✓ ***Diversify Heritage Products to Minimize Impacts:***

Diversifying heritage tourism is a strategic priority for ensuring the long-term sustainability of Türkiye's heritage assets while alleviating environmental and social pressures linked to concentrated tourism flows. A multidimensional diversification approach not only spreads tourism benefits across different regions but also enhances visitor experience, strengthens local economies, and supports environmental preservation and sustainability.

One effective strategy involves promoting rural tourism linked to cultural heritage, including agritourism, faith-based tourism, and gastronomy tourism, to reduce pressure on urban centers while highlighting the unique lifestyles, traditions, and natural landscapes of Türkiye's rural and natural heritage. Another approach is to focus on intangible heritage. These models allow tourists to engage with authentic rural experiences, support local producers, and contribute to regional development through sustainable tourism practices. Encouraging traditional festivals and seasonal events organized or supported by the TMoCT is also important. These events serve as platforms to celebrate Türkiye's diverse cultural expressions while offering distinctive experiences to travelers. Harvest festivals for geographically marked products and regional culinary celebrations, particularly those showcasing Turkish cuisine as an intangible cultural heritage, can support local economies, reinforce cultural identity, and reduce food transportation carbon emissions, promoting environmental sustainability (Charzyński et al., 2015).

In addition, faith tourism holds significant potential to revitalize historic religious sites while fostering interfaith dialogue and cultural understanding. Destinations such as Konya, Şanlıurfa, Edirne, and others offer deeply spiritual and cultural experiences, particularly for visitors from OIC countries. These sites contribute not only to tourism revenue but also to the soft power and cultural diplomacy of Türkiye, helping to counter Islamophobia and strengthen cross-cultural ties (Cifci & Akova, 2016). The adaptive reuse and restoration of traditional houses, such as Cumalıkızık in Bursa, Şirince in İzmir, and Odunpazarı in Eskişehir, can play a dual role in conserving heritage and expanding accommodation options with low environmental impact.

Similar opportunities exist in other potential destinations and revitalizing caravanserais, trade inns, and archaeological ruins, transforming them into educational, cultural, and tourism products while maintaining authenticity and sustainability.

To support these efforts, Türkiye should continuously identify, develop, and promote new heritage products, routes, and destinations. This includes providing targeted incentives to the cultural and creative sectors, especially artisans, traditional craftsmen, culinary entrepreneurs, and small-scale rural tourism operators, to encourage innovation and sustainability. A strategic approach to demand management is also critical: while emerging destinations should be supported with marketing and development efforts, over-visited sites may require demarketing or capacity regulation to preserve their integrity and improve the quality of visitor experiences. According to qualitative analysis, it was emphasized by nearly all participants that creating content and narrating the sites with a story in terms of creating a new heritage product is extremely important. In this regard, **P4** mentioned: *"When it comes to marketing, storytelling truly comes to the fore. Presenting cultural heritage within a narrative, [...] actually enhances the success of heritage tourism sites."* Many participants, in particular, emphasized that promoting storytelling with an influencer [celebrity character] would help reach a wider audience. In this regard, **P5** noted: *"There's a huge difference between me telling of this story and İlber ORTAYLI's [a widely recognized scholar and public figure]. In other words, who's telling it is as important as what's being told."*

Digital innovation and data-informed strategies can greatly enhance this diversification agenda. As discussed earlier, using smart tourism tools to monitor visitor flows, predict demand, and manage peak visitation periods can help distribute tourism pressure more evenly. Incentivizing investments in less-developed heritage areas and underrepresented heritage resources will encourage tourists to explore beyond the mainstream routes, promoting a more equitable and inclusive tourism landscape. Hence, effective diversification of heritage tourism in Türkiye requires a balanced, inclusive, and environmentally conscious approach that not only showcases the country's vast heritage resources but also empowers local communities, protects cultural authenticity, and ensures resilience in the face of shifting global tourism trends.

✓ ***Optimize Funding of Sustainable Heritage Tourism***

Ensuring the long-term protection and sustainable development of heritage tourism in Türkiye also depends heavily on effective and diversified financial strategies. Currently, revenues generated from tourism—including the Tourism Contribution Tax managed by the Turkish TGA are funneled into the general state budget, which can limit their direct application to heritage preservation financial needs. To address this, a portion of these revenues must be earmarked specifically for the preservation, restoration, and renovation of cultural and natural heritage. This would establish a transparent, fair, and sustainable funding mechanism that secures consistent investment in the maintenance and preservation of Türkiye's heritage assets. With tourism income reaching $61.1 billion in 2024 (TÜRSAB, 2025), the financial capacity to support such earmarked allocations exists. Strategic public budgeting should include the transfer of funds to municipalities hosting key cultural heritage areas, ensuring that local authorities are empowered to lead site-specific protection and development efforts. These allocations could be embedded in Türkiye's development plans, aligning with national priorities for sustainable regional growth.

To further diversify funding sources, Türkiye should also actively engage with international cultural heritage financing opportunities, such as the European Commission's "CulturEU" and "Creative Europe" programs and UNESCO's "World Heritage Fund" (European Commission, 2025; UNESCO, 2025c). Establishing a national coordination mechanism or specialized unit

focused on preparing competitive proposals for these programs would help Türkiye attract global funds, resources, and expertise, while also enhancing its visibility and leadership in heritage protection.

Moreover, dynamic pricing models can be adopted to manage visitor demand and optimize income. For example, entrance fees to heritage sites could be adjusted based on peak and off-peak periods or offer differentiated rates for international versus local visitors. This strategy not only generates higher revenue during high-demand times but also helps control overcrowding, thereby reducing the strain on heritage infrastructure. In line with this idea, our qualitative data analysis reveals that it is important to determine the profile of the target tourist profile before opening a site to heritage tourism for an effective visitor management plan. In this regard, **P1** recommended:

> *"[...] If a region's visitor profile is determined before it's opened to heritage tourism, branding and promotion can be implemented accordingly. For example, Europe's archaeological sites are generally visited by intellectuals, that is, by upper-income visitors. [...] For example [...] when you go to Venice, you pay a visitor's tax in addition to the accommodation tax. People go there willingly, and at the end of the day, only those who can afford it go there. And what happens? You avoid overtourism, prevent the erosion of your cultural heritage, and somehow make it a manageable policy."*

In parallel, revenues from additional services such as gift shops, guided tours, and digital platforms (e.g., virtual museums and online ticketing systems) should be reinvested into preservation initiatives. Additional measures such as tax reductions for private contributions, sponsorships, energy and employment subsidies, and land use incentives can encourage the private sector to co-finance heritage projects. These efforts should be guided by clear sustainability criteria to ensure that commercial involvement aligns with cultural and environmental priorities. By institutionalizing earmarked heritage funds, adopting demand-sensitive pricing models, leveraging international grants, and incentivizing public-private collaboration, Türkiye can create a resilient, sustainable and proactive financing model for heritage tourism. This approach will not only safeguard cultural assets but also contribute to economic resilience, regional equity, and the global competitiveness of Türkiye's heritage destinations.

Table 12. Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?

Marketing strategies	**M**
Social media and digital marketing.	4,38
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.	4,14
Influencer and content marketing.	4,11
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.	4,05
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).	3,68

Table 12 outlines the marketing strategies that should be prioritized for the promotion of heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The highest-rated strategy is *social media and digital marketing* (M = 4.38), indicating a strong preference for modern, cost-effective, and wide-reaching promotional tools. This is followed by *international tourism fairs and exhibitions* (M = 4.14) and *influencer and content marketing* (M = 4.11), both emphasizing the importance of global visibility and engaging storytelling. *Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies* (M = 4.05) also receive high support, reflecting the need for integrated promotional efforts within the broader tourism ecosystem. In contrast, *traditional advertising methods* such as TV, radio, and print media (M = 3.68) are rated lower, suggesting a shift away from conventional channels

toward more dynamic and interactive marketing approaches. Overall, the results highlight a clear preference for digital and experiential strategies to effectively promote heritage tourism in Türkiye.

Table 13 presents the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects in Türkiye (n = 56). The most significant source is *government grants and subsidies* (M = 4.21), indicating strong reliance on public sector support. This is followed by funding from *international donors*, such as UNESCO and the World Bank (M = 4.04), and *entrance fees* collected from visitors (M = 3.96), both seen as important contributors to heritage financing. *Tourism taxes* (M = 3.79) and *private sector investments through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)* (M = 3.68) are also moderately acknowledged, pointing to mixed perceptions of their effectiveness or prevalence. In contrast, *branded product sales* (M = 3.29) and *crowdfunding or community contributions* (M = 3.23) are rated the lowest, suggesting they are either underutilized or perceived as less impactful. Overall, the findings reveal a funding landscape dominated by state and institutional support, with limited engagement from grassroots or market-based sources.

Table 13. What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?

Primary sources	**M**
Government grants and subsidies.	4,21
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).	4,04
Entrance fees.	3,96
Tourism taxes.	3,79
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).	3,68
Branded Product sales.	3,29
Crowdfunding and community contributions.	3,23

Table 14 identifies funding mechanisms that should be strengthened to support sustainable heritage tourism in Türkiye (n = 56). The highest-rated option is *sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits* (M = 4.11), indicating strong support for linking sustainability standards with tangible economic incentives. This is followed closely by *public-private partnerships for infrastructure development* (M = 4.05), reflecting the perceived importance of collaborative investment in heritage-related facilities and services. *Local business investment schemes*, such as microloans for artisans (M = 4.00), also receive high support, emphasizing the value of empowering local entrepreneurship and preserving traditional arts and crafts. Lastly, *heritage conservation grants and tax incentives* (M = 3.84) are seen as important but slightly less prioritized. Overall, the results suggest that a combination of certification-based incentives, cross-sector collaboration, and local economic empowerment are key areas for strengthening funding mechanisms in sustainable heritage tourism.

Table 14. Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism?

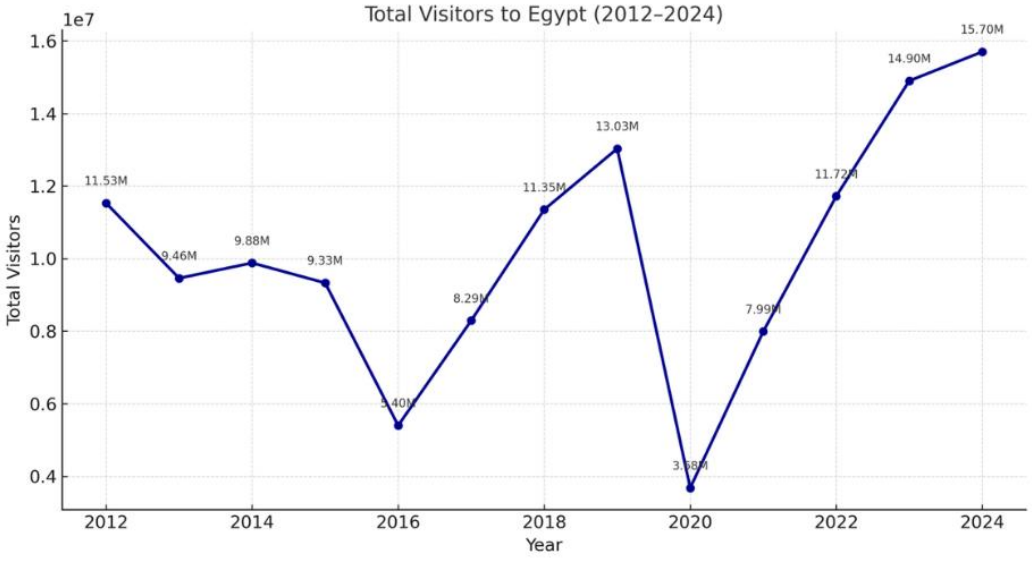
Funding mechanisms	**M**
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.	4,11
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.	4,05
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).	4,00
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.	3,84

4.2. Case Country: Egypt

4.2.1. General Outlook of Heritage Tourism in Egypt

Egypt is an OIC country that is renowned for the ancient pyramids, pharaohs (cultural heritage), and the majestic Nile (natural heritage) that dates back to a period extending for more than seven millennia. Various archeological sites are available along the Nile and in the countryside on a traditional Dahabiya sailboat. However, Egypt is so much more than its monuments and fabulously rich history; almost every part of the country is distinguished for its songs, poetry, dances, handicrafts, and other forms of intangible heritage. Along with remittances from Egyptians living abroad, the Suez Canal earnings, and foreign direct investments, tourism is one of Egypt's primary sources of foreign income.

Figure 11. Total Visitors to Egypt (2012-2014)



Source: (UNWTO, 2025)

According to the latest official data, Egypt received 15.7 million tourist arrivals with $15.3 billion tourism revenues in 2024, which has recovered and exceeded pre-pandemic levels after years of difficulties connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, which observed tourist arrival numbers fall to 3.6 million in 2020 (State Information Service, 2025). Egypt has also built its tourism infrastructure significantly beyond its world-famous historic sites between the Giza Pyramids and the Nile Valley through major capacity growth over the last twenty years. The UNWTO Key Tourism Statistics reveals that hotel establishments grew from an initial 752 units during the early 1990s to 1,207 with continuous investment in accommodation facilities. The total growth in hotel rooms was remarkable as it increased from approximately 65,000 units to almost 394,000 units alongside a corresponding surge in bed capacity from 129,000 to 425,000 beds until 2022 (UNWTO, 2025). Figure 11 also illustrates the number of visitor arrivals (in millions) to Egypt each year from 2012 to 2024.

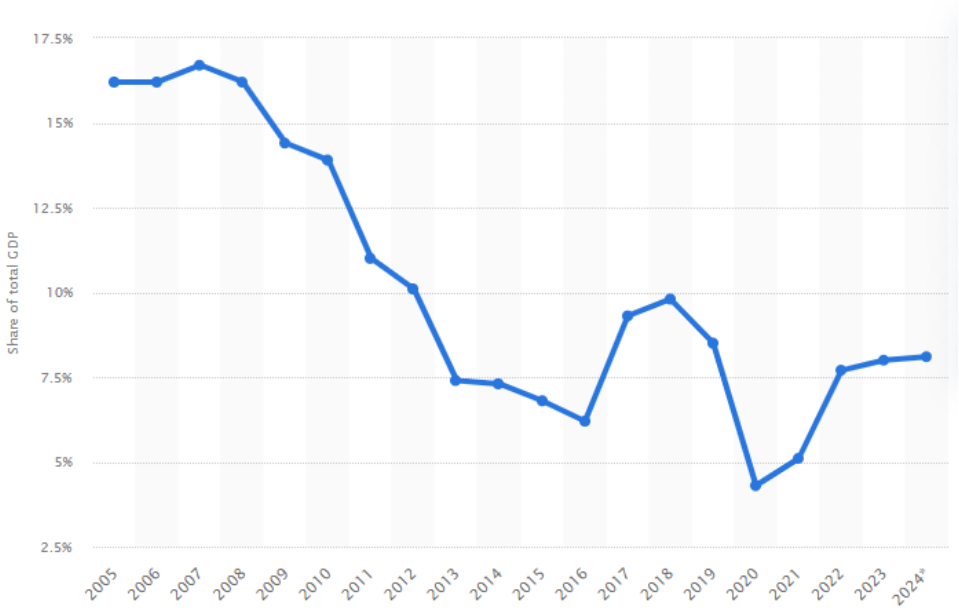
4.2.2. Development and Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Egypt

Egypt is the most popular Middle Eastern destination for international tourists. Egyptian tourism regulations have supported the development of unique recreational experiences in coastal regions to diversify the tourism products (i.e., golf, religious, yacht, desert, recreational,

cultural events, maritime, eco, safari, beach, sports, therapeutic, festivals, and conferences and exhibitions), while ancient sites (e.g., the Pyramids of Giza, El-Menia, Luxor, Aswan, and Abu Simbel) remain the World's top tourist destination. In the 19th century, package tours from northern Europe and Thomas Cook's Nile steamboat services popularized Egypt tourism (Boniface & Cooper, 2001). Although the Pyramids and tombs of Giza and Thebes are famous for their ancient structures, Egypt also has a great number of other archaeological sites identified in the World Heritage List.

Unfortunately, throughout history, Egypt's valuable heritage has been and is still threatened by looting for trading in black markets. Hence, Egypt has an intense tendency to promote new archaeological discoveries to attract visitors that are more international in general (Mustafa, 2021). Egypt is increasing its tourism share in GDP with effective strategies after the COVID-19 global travel restrictions that harmed the international tourist movements. Figure 12 shows the contribution of the tourism industry to gross domestic product (GDP) in Egypt from 2005 to 2024.

Figure 12. The contribution of tourism industry to gross domestic product (GDP) in Egypt (2005-2014)



Source: (Statista, 2025a)

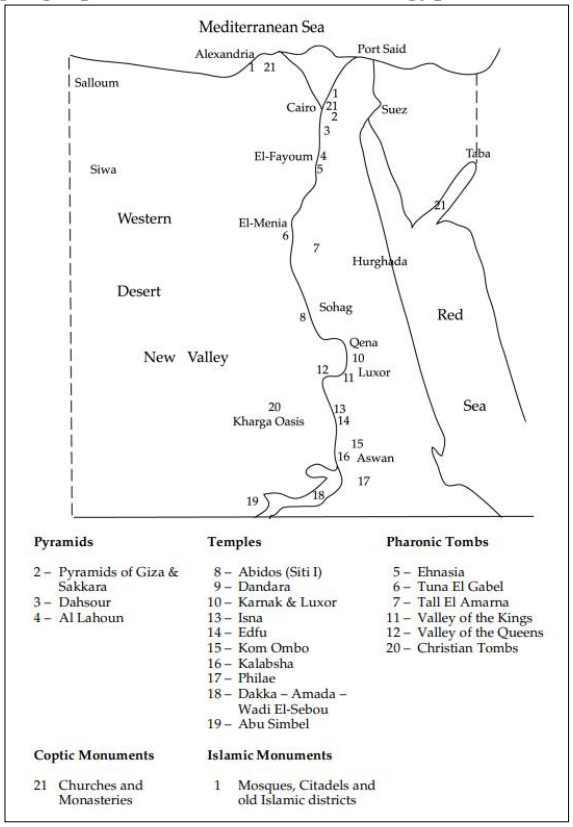
The Egyptian tourism industry has also expanded its offerings to beach-based tourism across both the Red Sea and Mediterranean coast regions because visitors preferred land to sparse water and energy supplies in the Nile valley. The hotel room distribution in Egypt exists predominantly through Cairo, Luxor, and Alexandria, while the Red Sea coast continues to expand (Helmy & Cooper, 2002). According to the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' (MoTA) newsletter in 2024, Egypt's total hotel room count was 222,716 by the end of March 2024 (MoTA, 2024). Another unique advantage of Egypt is incorporating tourism through its local food. Rich and diverse Egyptian cuisine offers an intangible cultural experience to visitors with traditional cooking techniques, ingredients, food tours, and cooking classes (Saeed & Al Atrees, 2024). These aspects of the Egyptian cultural elements provide tourists with distinctive activities, which enrich their overall traveling experience.

4.2.3. Heritage Tourism Assets in Egypt

4.2.3.1. Tangible Heritage Tourism Assets in Egypt

Egypt has plenty of tangible heritage assets in nature. The Egyptian Antiquities Service was founded in 1858 after national authorities set up both site protection and antiquities export regulation systems. The Ministry of Culture currently confers responsibility for the management and preservation of antiquities sites to the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Figure 13 showcases the geographical distribution of the Egyptian archaeological heritage.

Figure 13. The geographical distribution of the Egyptian archaeological heritage



Source: (Helmy and Cooper, 2002)

Until recently, seven properties in Egypt has been inscribed in UNESCO's World Heritage List, six of which are cultural — Abu Mena (1979), Ancient Thebes with its Necropolis (1979), Historic Cairo (1979), Memphis and its Necropolis – the Pyramid Fields from Giza to Dahshur (1979), the Nubian Monuments from Abu Simbel to Philae (1979), and Saint Catherine Area (2002) — and one natural site, Wadi Al-Hitan (Whale Valley) (2005). In addition, there are thirty-four sites on the tentative list presented in Table 16 (UNESCO, 2025f); while only 10 elements were inscribed in the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity for Egypt, these are presented in Table 15. Egypt has also received a total of 1,010,711 USD in approved international assistance, and forty-seven approved international assistance requests (UNESCO, 2025e).

Table 15. Elements on the Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Year	Elements
2024	Henna: rituals, aesthetic, and social practices
2024	Semsemiah: instrument crafting and playing
2023	Arts, skills and practices associated with engraving metals (gold, silver and copper)
2022	Festivals related to the Journey of the Holy family in Egypt
2022	Date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions and practices
2021	Arabic calligraphy: knowledge, skills, and practices
2020	Handmade weaving in Upper Egypt (Sa'eed)
2018	Traditional hand puppetry
2016	Tahteeb, stick game
2008	Al-Sirah Al-Hilaliyyah epic

Source: (UNESCO, 2025e)

4.2.3.2. Intangible Heritage Tourism Assets in Egypt

According to UNESCO, five domains of intangible cultural heritage in Egypt include oral traditions alongside expressions using language (i) and performing arts with social practices (ii) and festive events (iii), in addition to knowledge about nature (iv) and traditional craftsmanship (v) (UNESCO, 2013b). Egypt offers multiple cultural heritage activities that tourists can enjoy and explore the wealth of heritage resources of the country in general. According to Saeed and Al Atrees (2024), several facets of Egyptian intangible heritage should be regarded as main heritage tourism offerings, including (1) Traditional music and belly dance together with a wide range of classical Arabic and contemporary pop music types that reflect Egypt's historical artistic heritage. (2) The country specializes in a wide range of intricate handicrafts consisting of carpet textiles, ceramics, and jewelry that appear frequently in markets and bazaars. (3) Local restaurants and food markets feature traditional Egyptian dishes, which combine Persian, Turkish, and Greek culinary elements to create Koshari, Ful Medames, and Taameya. (4) The numerous festivals (e.g., Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and the Pharaonic Festival) of Egypt, alongside their authentic cultural celebrations, provide travelers with accessible chances to celebrate local heritage, which serves as a valuable treasury for sustainable and authentic tourist experiences. However, in contrast to intangible heritage, which often suffers from inadequate documentation, interpretation, and preservation efforts, both at the local and international levels, tangible heritage generally receives most attention in conserving globally, as legislation and agreements primarily aim to safeguard and preserve these physical assets from illegal activities (Mursi, 2008). Table 16 presents a tentative list of archaeological and cultural sites of Egypt based on UNESCO.

Table 16. Tentative List of Archaeological and Cultural Sites

Year	Sites
1994	Siwa archaeological area
1994	Temple of Serabit Khadem
1994	North Sinai archaeological Sites Zone
1994	Temple of Hator built by Ramses III
1994	Dahshour archaeological area
1994	El Fayoum: Kom Aushim (Karanis), Dimai (Soknopaiounesos), Qasr Qarun (Dionysias), Batn I hrit (Theadelphia), Byahma-Medinet el Fayoum (Krokodilopolis or Arsinoe), Abgig-Hawara, Seila-Medient Madi (Narmouthis), tell Umm el-Breigat (tebtunis)
1994	El-Gendi Fortress
1994	Rutho Monastery
1994	Wadi Feiran
1994	Pharaon Island
1994	Dahab
1994	Minia
1994	Newibah castle
2002	Ras Mohammed
2003	Gebel Qatrani Area, Lake Qaroun Nature Reserve
2003	Southern and Smaller Oases, the Western Desert
2003	Bird Migration Routes
2003	Desert Wadis
2003	Mountain Chains
2003	Great Desert Landscapes
2003	Alexandria, ancient remains and the new library
2003	Abydos, city of pilgrimage of the Pharaohs
2003	Pharaonic temples in Upper Egypt from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods
2003	Necropolises of Middle Egypt, from the Middle Empire to the Roman period
2003	Raoudha nilometre in Cairo
2003	The monasteries of the Arab Desert and Wadi Natrun
2003	Two citadels in Sinai from the Saladin period (Al-Gundi and Pharaoh's island)
2003	The An-Nakhl fortress, a stage on the pilgrimage route to Mecca
2003	Oasis of Fayoum, hydraulic remains and ancient cultural landscapes
2003	Historic quarters and monuments of Rosetta/Rachid
2008	Dababiya
2010	Helwan Observatory
2015	Kharga Oasis and the Small Southern Oases
2021	Egyptian Museum in Cairo

Source: (UNESCO, 2025f)

4.2.4. Challenges for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Egypt

Sustainable heritage tourism development in Egypt is affected by many challenges. It is important to identify these challenges and address them to preserve the cultural heritage of Egypt to future generations without compromising the thriving tourist industry.

Cultural Asset Protection Against Illicit Trafficking: The large volume of heritage assets (e.g., monuments, artifacts, and mummies) makes Egyptian heritage tourism difficult to effectively manage with an integrated site management plan. It also creates challenges to obtain sufficient funds. Especially the problems brought by climate change and pollution, as well as inadequate water and sewer drainage, stand out as important factors for the development of Egyptian heritage tourism (Hang, & Kong, 2001). A study by Elgammal and Refaat (2021) showcases that Egyptian heritage tourism has two main challenges, namely management-related (cultural sites carrying capacity, interpretation of cultural heritage attractions, site accessibility, hygiene, and safety) and marketing-related (the limited number of exhibited destinations, using technology, and promoting heritage tourism locally).

Poorly managed cultural heritage destinations not only harm local communities but also undermine the tourism industry itself when heritage resources and values are degraded. Nevertheless, Egyptian tourism suffers due to insufficient control and smuggling; however, halting the development of tourism remains impossible. The challenge is not merely to stop illegal excavations and smuggling, but for all stakeholders to collaborate in achieving sustainable planning, local ownership, and management. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the needs of Egyptian host communities as well as the principles and concerns involved in safeguarding cultural heritage (Mohamed Atef, 2021).

Overtourism and Environmental Damage: There is also a symbolic link between tourists and heritage, where individuals require heritage knowledge to develop a deeper perspective and to enrich the meaning of their lives. However, a problem arises when individuals satisfy such a need through irresponsible behaviors (i.e., Random navigation, lettering, removal of souvenir pieces, graffiti on-site, and improper sanitation practices against the structures), which is still one of the main problems facing Egyptian archaeological site destinations. Specifically, over tourism causes wear and tear problems, the high level of moisture and condensation created by breathing, sweating, and touching by visitors in the architectural structures of the sites (Shackely, 2001; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Furthermore, many heritage buildings suffer, as they are being located in polluted areas, exposing them to toxins including Sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ammonia, hydrogen Sulphide, and formaldehyde; in many cases, these exceeded the international limits (El-Mekawy et al. 2021). These issues create various threats in terms of potential degradation of Egypt's heritage, which can in turn influence dispossessed communities' cultural integrity and resources, as well as create disadvantages for the tourism industry.

Climate Change: Another significant threat arises from climate change since rising summer temperatures cause granite stones to crack and lead to the fading of inscriptions. Winter rainfall frequency has also accelerated the erosion and deterioration of stone and mudbrick structures—buildings that historically endured for centuries due to minimal precipitation (Abdelnaby, 2017). In addition, the Valley of Kings, as well as the Valley of Queens, experiences near-continuous flooding in its temples and tombs because of excessive rainfall. Water vapor that escapes from the Aswan Dam reservoir creates extra humidity, which accelerates temple deterioration through salt crystal growth because salt particles expand inside sandstone wall blocks. Most importantly, the population growth problems and accelerated urban development have worsened the conditions surrounding archaeological sites by intensifying agricultural activities in nearby areas. Particularly, constant cultivating and irrigation techniques have increased the groundwater table, stressing the structural foundations with surplus moisture (United Nations Environmental Program, 2018). These environmental challenges also affect the Nile and its surroundings as an important natural heritage asset.

Governance Challenges and Risks to World Heritage Status: Despite the rich heritage assets of Egypt, only seven sites have been listed in the UNESCO's World Heritage List, where might be withdrawn from the list because of various problems, including (1) managements of the sites failing to provide safety; 2) insufficient management plans; some sites are not part of tourism initiatives; 3) lack of local communities' involvement in site preservation; 4) some sites' degrade without meaningful action to mitigate deterioration; 5) unsuitable conservation techniques and urban sprawl; 6) camels and horses in the Giza pyramids and other sites (Duqail, 2019). These challenges alert an immediate collaboration between the local government and tourism industry to implement sustainable tourism practices that benefit both tourists and local communities.

4.2.5. Success Factors for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Egypt

The development of sustainable heritage tourism in Egypt relies on a complex interaction of factors that all contribute to the preservation of cultural assets as well as the economic prosperity and well-being of the community. This section discusses the success factors that support the development of sustainable heritage tourism in Egypt, namely efficient governance and institutional infrastructure, community engagement, responsible tourism approach, regional collaboration, and creative heritage promotion programs. Appreciating these aspects is crucial in preserving the rich cultural heritage of Egypt against the growing pressures of overtourism and in ensuring the sustainability of tourism development to make tourism development more sustainable and beneficial for everyone now and in the future.

The Mass Tourism and Economic Dynamics in Egypt: The increasing interest in the Middle East and the increasing number of explorer tourists raised Egypt's touristic appeal towards the end of the 19th century. Tourism to Egypt began to be especially promoted, particularly with the building of the Suez Canal in 1869 and attempts to restore Egypt's image in order to draw European visitors. The Egyptian advertisements in Baedeker's Egyptian travel guide additionally contributed considerably to interest in Egypt. In the fifth edition published in 1902, international tour operators came to the fore as a new force in tourism. Instead of individual trips to Egypt, which had a very different culture and structure, international tour operators such as London-based Thomas Cook & Son and Henry Gaze & Sons stepped in; and mass tourism movements began to intensify (Mohamed Atef, 2021). Consequently, by advertising and promoting travel to Egypt, tour operators turned into an economic power in their own right, hence increasing tourist demand and transforming the T&H industry into one of Egypt's major commercial ventures. Along with the alternative types of Egypt tourism offerings, the tourism and hospitality industry has been placed at the forefront of revenue-producing hard currency, contributing 8.1 per cent of Egypt's GNP and offering directly over 2.5 million possibilities for employment (Statista, 2025a, b). However, this also created a dependency on these conglomerate tour operators and increased leakage of tourism revenues.

Governance and Preservation of Egypt's Archaeological Heritage: On a national scale, worries to preserve Egypt's cultural treasures and regulate the export of antiquities spurred the establishment of the Egyptian Antiquities Service in 1858. The Ministry of Culture currently assigns the Supreme Council of Antiquities responsibility for the management and preservation of antiquities sites. At the international level, UNESCO and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has created handbooks and worldwide standards for the administration of the archaeological heritage comprising aspects of visitor control and display (ICOMOS, 1990, 1993).

Table 17. Notable Museums in Egypt

Museum Name	City	Key Focus / Description	Related Historical Period(s)
The Egyptian Museum	Cairo	World's largest collection of Pharaonic antiquities.	Predynastic to Greco-Roman Periods
National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC)	Cairo	Covers full range of Egyptian civilization.	Predynastic to Modern Era
Graeco-Roman Museum	Alexandria	Artifacts from the Graeco-Roman period.	Ptolemaic and Roman Periods
Museum of Islamic Art	Cairo	Extensive Islamic artifact collection.	Umayyad to Ottoman Periods
The Coptic Museum	Cairo	Largest collection of Coptic artifacts.	Byzantine to Early Islamic Periods
Royal Jewelry Museum	Alexandria	Jewelry and collectibles from the royal family.	Muhammad Ali Dynasty
Nubia Museum	Aswan	Highlights Nubian heritage and history.	Predynastic to Modern Nubian Period
Crocodile Museum	Aswan	Dedicated to Sobek, crocodile god.	New Kingdom
National Military Museum	Cairo	Egyptian military history.	Pharaonic to Modern Periods
Royal Carriages Museum	Cairo	Royal carriages from the 19th–20th century.	Muhammad Ali Dynasty
Manial Palace Museum	Cairo	Artifacts of Prince Muhammad Ali.	Muhammad Ali Dynasty
Sharm al-Sheikh Museum	South Sinai	Diverse representation of civilizations.	Predynastic to Islamic Periods
Mummification Museum	Luxor	Focus on mummification practices.	Pharaonic Periods
Imhotep Museum	Giza	Dedicated to architect Imhotep.	Old Kingdom
Hurghada Museum	Red Sea	First antiquities museum in the Red Sea area.	Various Historical Periods
Gayer Anderson Museum	Cairo	Islamic art and architecture.	Mamluk and Ottoman Periods
Kafr El-Sheikh Museum	Kafr El-Sheikh	Local contributions to history.	Predynastic to Islamic Periods
Helwan Corner Museum	Cairo	Royal rest house turned museum.	Muhammad Ali Dynasty
National Police Museum	Cairo	History of policing in Egypt.	Modern Period
Cairo Int. Airport Museum - Terminal 2 & 3	Cairo	Heritage highlights for travelers.	Various Historical Periods

Source: (MoTA, 2025a)

Arab Tourism Cooperation and Egypt's Museum Landscape: Another milestone in the development of Egypt's T&H sector is Arab tourism cooperation, which began bilaterally and grew globally under the League of Arab States. Of 11 bilateral agreements, Egypt was most active in environmental tourism. These agreements encouraged tourist movement, collaborative services, environmental and historical preservation, data interchange, knowledge, and experience sharing. To assist these activities, the Arab Ministerial Council for Tourism was founded in 1997, and the Arab Tourism Organization in 2006. In 2015, Egypt became the head of the WTO Colombian Executive Office (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020). Egypt's heritage tourism success stands out with its remarkable attractions in the field of museology, with its diverse and historically rich museums serving as vital institutions for preserving and showcasing the nation's multifaceted cultural heritage. Please see the current notable Egyptian museums in Table 17. Along with the existing museums, Egypt is preparing itself for the opening of the "Grand Egyptian Museum- (GEM), which will present more than 100,000 artifacts and costs 1.2 billion dollars, and will be opened on November 4, 2025. The museum, a certain part of which was previously opened in 2021 along the Royal Mummy Passage and the Avenue of Sphinxes, will exhibit all the treasures of Tutankhamun and other ancient Egyptian artifacts (Grand Egyptian Museum, 2025). Table 17 illustrates notable museums in Egypt and related historical periods.

Cultural Heritage Awareness and Underwater Tourism in Egypt: Egypt has also sunken monuments, which attract a great number of tourists, and display the underwater heritage of the country. The underwater heritage of ancient Alexandria resides beneath the Mediterranean Sea and includes the Pharos Lighthouse alongside Cleopatra's palace and the Isis temple remains, providing visitors with distinctive archaeological and diving adventures. The MoTA in Egypt additionally puts forward significant promotion efforts through several projects implemented in cooperation with ICOMOS and UNESCO to encourage heritage tourism. For instance, activities are conducted to raise awareness during World Heritage Day (MoTA, 2025b), the "Children's World" program aims to instill a bond for cultural heritage among children (MoTA, 2025c), and the "Stories & Media" initiative seeks to promote historical values to a wide audience through various media channels (MoTA, 2025d). These initiatives support fostering awareness of heritage among all segments of society.

Advancing Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Egypt: Despite all these positive developments, sustainability has become an essential subject in tourism planning and development in Egypt. Heritage tourism plays a critical role in sustainable tourism, which can promote cultural exchanges, safeguard heritage assets, and reduce prejudice and discrimination among various communities. In this regard, the Tourist Development Authority (TDA), alongside the Egyptian Tourist Agency (ETA), established to advance tourism as part of economic development policies, maintains sustainable initiatives for Egyptian tourism. Therefore, it is important to approach heritage tourism responsibly in order to avoid negative impacts on local communities, tangible and intangible cultural heritages. The balance in preservation demands with tourism development presents significant success of Egypt T&H. In this sense, Egypt also demonstrates considerable sustainable development potential in multiple forms of tourism, particularly in supporting the development of heritage tourism, as systematically summarized in Table 18. Considering heritage tourism serves as a secondary product for all the tourism motivations, overall tourism development would also support heritage tourism development.

Table 18. Types of Tourism in Egypt

Types	Descriptions
Recreational Tourism	Includes beach tourism along the Mediterranean and Red Seas. Popular destinations: Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada, and Nile cruises.
Cultural Tourism	Focuses on ancient and historical sites from Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, and Islamic periods. Major sites: Giza Pyramids, Luxor, Abu Simbel.
Eco-Tourism	Centered on natural reserves like Ras Muhammad, St. Catherine, and Wadi Al-Rayan. Offers guided nature tours and fossil exploration.
Medical Tourism	Based on natural hot springs, sands, and dry climate. Key destinations: Helwan, Siwa, Fayoum, Safaga.
Sports Tourism	Egypt hosts major sports events and has infrastructure for football, squash, diving, etc. Events: Africa Cup, Pharaohs Rally.
Festival Tourism	Includes cultural, film, music, and folklore festivals. Examples: Cairo Film Festival, Abu Simbel Sun Festival.
Conference & Exhibition	Egypt hosts international conferences in Cairo, Alexandria, and Sharm El Sheikh. Topics range from business to tourism.
Religious Tourism	Attracts visitors to Islamic, Christian, and Jewish sites. Landmarks: Al-Azhar Mosque, St. Catherine Monastery, Mount Sinai.

Source: (Elnagar & Derbali, 2020)

4.2.6. Recommended Practices for Egypt

Through its efforts in heritage preservation in conjunction with cultural development projects, the T&H tourism sector of Egypt reveals significant progress towards sustainability. However, heritage assets, along with antiquities and archaeological sites, still require extra safeguarding against growing threats from both climate change and forced carrying capacity due to increased numbers of visitors. Effective management strategies incorporating NGO and local community cooperation should also guide capacity building and public awareness. Technology can also assist heritage area entrepreneurs in achieving sustainable development by facilitating sustainable development through inclusive tourism expansion. Some of the primary recommendations for the effective development of the Egyptian heritage tourism sector are detailed below:

- ✓ ***Inclusive and Sustainable Tourism in Heritage Contexts***

Only if heritage tourism is sustainably managed can it contribute to the development of the local communities through promoting conservation efforts on heritage sites for the future. With a sustainable approach, the contractor can reduce unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and increase economic support for protection from governmental institutions, international tourism parties, and donor agencies. In this manner, raising awareness among visitors and local communities can effectively encourage individuals to value the world's cultural heritage.

However, as argued by scholars (e.g., Pedersen, 2002), the whole process of sustainable development usually lacks oversight since it is difficult to design, implement and maintain in practice. Because the sustainable management of heritage places is a complex process, it essentially requires the involvement of all stakeholders (Nyaupane, 2009). In this sense, the UNWTO framework for inclusive community development through tourism (2020) clearly states that *"Placing inclusive community development at the heart of tourism policies through education, investment, innovation and technology can transform the livelihoods of many millions, while also preserving our environment and our culture and drive a more inclusive and sustainable recovery of tourism"* (p. 210). Therefore, for the long-term sustainability of heritage tourism, it

is of great importance for Egypt to align its present development model with the strategic Sustainable Heritage Tourism (SHT) framework of UNESCO. UNESCO's five strategic objectives—namely credibility, communication, conservation, capacity-building, and communities—serve to support the efforts of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (WHC) in guiding Sustainable Heritage Tourism (SHT; Albert, 2012). These objectives mainly focus on protection, communication, capacity building, and community participation; provide a holistic framework for shaping all cultural tourism policies, not just those specific to World Heritage sites, based on sustainability. The strategic approaches combined with these practices can secure Egypt's cultural heritage preservation alongside the empowerment of local communities and foster international tourism responsibility by reinforcing the country's position as a responsible actor in international tourism. A development of an efficient heritage sites management system can also bring Egypt's heritage tourism in line with the main principles stated by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) and Agenda 21.

✓ ***The Need of Effective Visitor Management Implementations***

The protection of Egyptian archaeological sites (tangible heritage) also requires both efficient visitor management implementations (e.g., zoning with staff along with limited entry points and resources strengthened against damage and regulatory controls) and softer visitor management techniques (e.g., interpretive and landscaping approaches) to stop illicit digging and plundering (Kuo, 2002). These measures should be implemented to prevent both random physical interactions and site vandalism by educating visitors beforehand and accessing both residents and tourists through site personnel and guide education, respectively, while improving facility structure and accessibility. The traditional preventions like creating fences around stepping areas and photo zones may help partially restrict tourist activities; however, align with other researchers' suggestions (e.g., Saeed & Atress, 2024), incorporating with advanced technology like AI- based virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) is key to enhance visitors' experience (De La Plata et al., 2022; Petrova & Hristov, 2021). In this context, the Story and Media applications developed by the Egyptian MoTA must be equipped with advanced technologies to offer more engaging and immersive travel experiences. For example, AI-based AR and VR technologies can be used to provide visitors with a virtual tour of a historical site or a digital experience of a traditional dance.

✓ ***Preventing Smuggling and Preservation of Archaeological Artefacts***

The Egyptian heritage sites need explicit information about destructive visitor actions through signs, since most people do not know about the slow-damaging effects of touching, walking, and unsafe climbing. The education of tour guides regarding site conduct represents a major consequence that leads them to serve as environmental teachers for site visitors. Controlling urban growth with proper conservation methods must occur to halt the ongoing deterioration of these regions. In this regard, the evaluation process must involve the public in the development and protection of cultural sites, with careful consideration of detailed sustainability and carrying capacity aspects.

On the other hand, Egypt has intensely experienced the smuggling of archaeological artefacts due to illegal excavations. In this regard, Egypt must repatriate these assets through political connections with the help of UNESCO (Mustafa, 2021). It is worth mentioning at this point that Egyptian archaeologists would conduct some public awareness campaigns through interaction and involvement of all stakeholders, aiming at raising Egyptians' awareness of heritage and its preservation (Nasser, 2003). In addition, as supporting the suggestion of Ghanem and Saad (2015), with the help of the strict Egyptian Law of Antiquities (Law No. 3, 2010), Egypt should support the protection of antiquities by a data base discouraging illegal activities against cultural

heritage, especially if the scope of this law is further expanded to address emerging challenges and modern threats (Abdelnaby, 2017). In this regard, Hassan (2014) noted the importance of capacity building through offering short courses, especially to local community youth, to become "heritage guardians". Therefore, the current efforts of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities with ICOMOS and UNESCO, such as World Heritage Day (MoTA, 2025b), Children's World (MoTA, 2025c) and Stories & Media (MoTA, 2025d) should be widened to include more inclusive and community-driven initiatives that promote heritage awareness, foster youth engagement, and integrate cultural education into broader heritage tourism strategies, ultimately contributing to the sustainable preservation and appreciation of Egypt's rich cultural heritage.

- ✓ ***Capacity Building for Heritage Entrepreneurs and Creating Community Awareness among Private Sector, Tourists and Locals***

From the perspective of intangible heritage, many organizations operate in Egypt toward heritage preservation including the Egyptian Society of Folk Traditions (ESFT) and the Egyptian Archives of Folk Life and Folk Traditions (EAFLFT) alongside the Supreme Council of Culture and the General Authority of Culture Palaces and cultural centers of handicrafts production/performed arts and the Supreme Council of Culture and others. However, Egyptian intangible heritage faces challenges from three primary factors that include public disinterest, commodification, and failing intergenerational knowledge transmission of artistic techniques. Therefore, national and international authorities should establish educational and awareness initiatives focusing on intangible heritage to promote knowledge among the general public and tourism stakeholders because globalization, alongside the media, has weakened social and cultural values. These initiatives need to create incentives for heritage responsibility; especially, the documentation of intangible heritage requires proper scientific database systems (Boumedine, 2008). This database must also include documentation about product categories, as well as the geographical distribution and production locations for products and information on materials, along with manufacturing protocols, cultural symbolism and historical development.

In addition, the availability of well-trained human resources in the T&H sector stands as the key requirement for sustainable heritage tourism development, particularly in key sectors such as accommodation, gastronomy, recreation, and tour guiding. These areas provide essential cultural contact points for tourist exchanges and satisfaction, which therefore require employees with detailed knowledge of local heritage and traditions in addition to their technical skills. Especially, the quality of the tour guiding service is a core component of heritage tourism since tour guides are frontline employees in the tourism industry and play a cornerstone role in shaping memorable tourism experiences in a heritage destination (El-sharkawy, 2015). For this reason, it is important to develop tourism and hospitality educational institutions and establish international collaborations at the higher education level.

Finally, small and medium-sized local enterprises can improve their market access through funding and training support to develop production and marketing of traditional handicrafts and performances (Hassan, 2018, 2023). Reflecting cultural heritage, traditional Egyptian handicrafts promote heritage tourism and tourist experience. From Sinai and Nubia, these crafts blend Islamic and pre-Islamic sources of inspiration. Among the various artisanal methods, the Foustat Traditional Crafts Centre maintains and revives woodwork, brass inlay, tent making, and stucco glass. These businesses help to build communities, reduce poverty, and boost local economies by providing training and jobs. Egypt's involvement in international exhibits and hosting of the 1995 International Conference of Crafts indicates its global leadership and promotion of its intangible cultural heritage (Hassan Abdou, 2020). However, the creation of

interpretational content about both tangible and intangible features of heritage items remains a challenge for raising community and tourists' awareness about the cultural worth of these assets. In this sense, "cultural creativity" studies proposed by UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) should be addressed for the potential of cultural diversity and creativity in generating economic and social benefits (UNESCO, 2021a; OECD, 2021). Utilizing advanced digital tools must be integrated into exhibitions at museums and travel guides and touristic brochures (Herrenhausen Symposium, 2017), can also offer visitors a more authentic and memorable travel experience through digital creativity (Kim et al., 2019).

4.3. Case Country: Italy

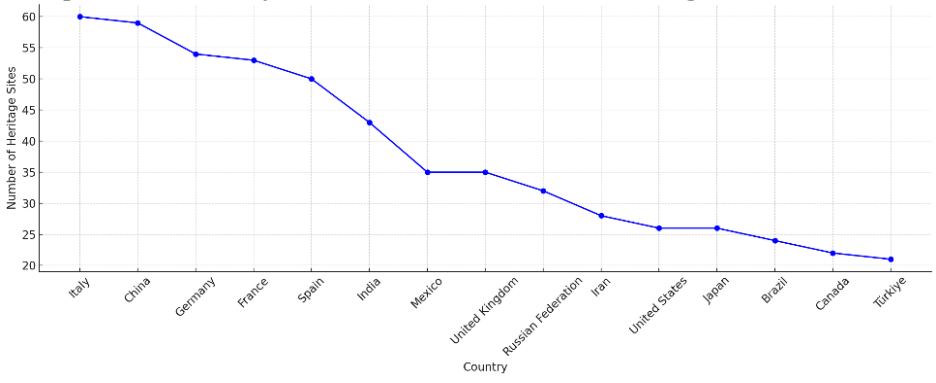
4.3.1. General Outlook of Heritage Tourism in Italy

Located in Southern Europe, Italy stands out for its rich history, diverse cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and world-class cuisine. With an impressive array of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, historic cities like Rome, Florence, and Venice, and natural beauty regions like Tuscany and the Amalfi Coast, the country is one of the most sought-after tourist destinations worldwide (UNWTO, 2023b).

Tourism is a major source of income for Italy. Heritage tourism in Italy greatly drives the country's tourist industry by means of its rich cultural, historical, and artistic assets. Cultural heritage plays an important role in the tourism development of Italy. Millions of visitors are drawn annually to cities with concrete and abstract historical riches such as Rome, Florence and Venice. Italy attracts great attention with its art, architecture, and traditions such as the Colosseum, the Vatican, and the Uffizi Gallery (Galli, 2024). UNESCO's World Heritage List has 1,199 cultural sites spread over 168 different countries. With sixty properties, around 5% of the WHL, Italy tops the list of nations with the greatest concentration of cultural riches globally (figure 14) (UNESCO, 2018). Italy is not only famous for its famous landmarks but also ranks in the top 15 tourist destinations (figure 15) (WTO, 2025).

As one of the countries with the most UNESCO World Heritage sites, Italy offers a diverse range of tourism types, including cultural tourism, gastronomic tourism, and rural tourism (UNESCO, 2024c). However, overtourism and sustainability are topics of considerable challenges in Italy (Seraphin et al., 2018).

Figure 14. Top 15 Countries by Number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites

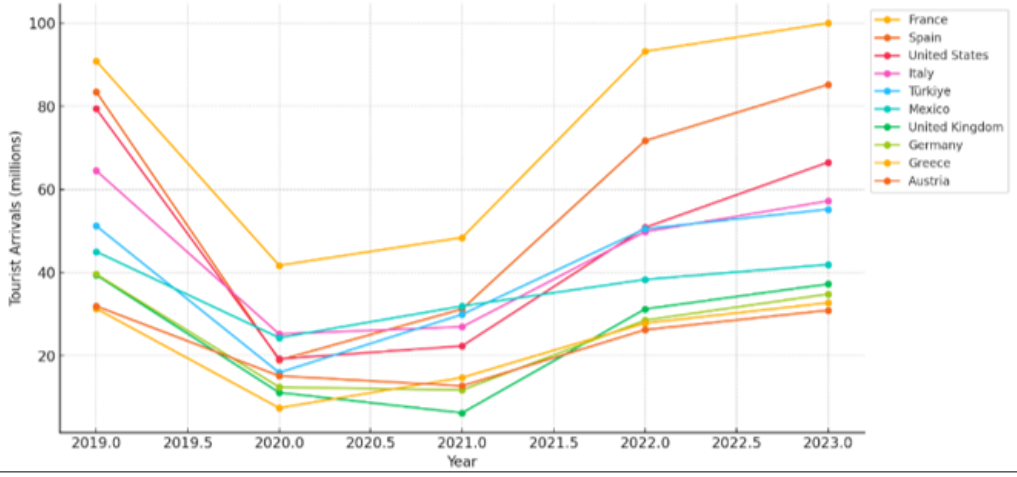


Source: (UNESCO, 2018)

Italy was the world's fourth most visited country in 2019 with 64.5 million visitors, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this number dropped significantly in 2020, falling to 25.2 million. This suggests that Italy, like other countries, was heavily affected by the pandemic. In 2021, visitor numbers increased only slightly, reaching 26.9 million, demonstrating a slow and cautious recovery. 2022 saw a significant recovery with 49.8 million visitors. Finally, in 2023, the number of visitors to Italy reached 57.2 million, largely approaching pre-pandemic levels. This data demonstrates that Italy has largely overcome the effects of the pandemic on its tourism sector and is once again becoming a strong tourist destination. Thanks particular to its cultural heritage, historic cities, and natural beauty, the country has managed to maintain its appeal to international tourists.

Figure 15. Top 10 Most Visited Countries (2019-2023) (in Millions)

Rank	Country	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023*
1	France	90.9	41.7	48.4	93.2	100.0
2	Spain	83.5	18.9	31.2	71.7	85.2
3	United States	79.4	19.2	22.3	50.8	66.5
4	Italy	64.5	25.2	26.9	49.8	57.2
5	Türkiye	51.2	15.9	29.9	50.5	55.2
6	Mexico	45.0	24.3	31.9	38.3	41.9
7	United Kingdom	39.4	11.1	6.2	31.2	37.2
8	Germany	39.6	12.4	11.7	28.5	34.8
9	Greece	31.3	7.4	14.7	27.8	32.7
10	Austria	31.9	15.1	12.7	26.2	30.9



Source: (WTO, 2025)

4.3.2. Development and Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Italy

The Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, signed in Faro, Portugal, in 2005, represents a turning point in the transformation of cultural heritage policies in Europe, including Italy. The Convention's fundamental significance lies in its redefinition and expansion of the concept of cultural heritage. This Convention encompasses not only the protection of tangible works and monuments, but also intangible heritage elements such as traditions, languages, and collective memories that shape community identities (Council of Europe, 2005). The Convention addresses contemporary policy objectives such as sustainable development. Significant strides are being made in the areas of economic growth, social well-being, and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, by integrating cultural heritage into broader societal frameworks, it aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which specifically address inclusive cities, quality education, and the reduction of inequalities (UNESCO, 2019b).

Italy signed the Faro Convention on 27 February 2013 and ratified it on 15 December 2020. The convention subsequently entered into force in Italy on 1 April 2021. According to this convention, the concept of cultural heritage has been significantly expanded, opening up new opportunities for its use and contribution to sustainable development (Cerquetti et al., 2022).

Italy's cultural heritage plays a central role in UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Italy stands out because of its rich cultural, historical, and natural assets. Cultural heritage tourism in Italy is characterized by strong links between cultural identity, economic development, and sustainable management, as well as the need for promotion. The Italian tourism industry is seeing consistent growth due to its extensive cultural heritage and effective marketing strategies. Italy possesses 60 properties listed as World Heritage and has fulfilled five terms on the World Heritage Committee. The location of the 60 assets on the map is shown in Figure 16. The country has submitted 64 State of Conservation Reports and received approval for one foreign aid request (UNESCO, 2024c).

Figure 16. Distribution map of Italy's 60 UNESCO heritage properties

Source: (UNESCO, 2024c)

4.3.3. Heritage Tourism Assets in Italy

With its rich historical, cultural, and natural heritage assets, Italy has the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world. As of 2024, this number has reached 60 (Table 19) (UNESCO, 2024c). In this context, heritage tourism assets in Italy range from ancient cities to medieval towns, from Renaissance architecture to natural landscapes. and include 'living' intangible heritage such as the Mediterranean diet, the Art of Neapolitan 'Pizzaiuolo,' Opera dei Pupi (Sicilian puppet theater), traditional violin craftsmanship in Cremona, alpinism, and practices like transhumance and dry-stone construction (UNESCO, 2025b).

Across these tangible and intangible forms, Italian heritage-tourism assets tend to develop through the UNESCO framework emphasizing outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity, community participation, and long-term safeguarding; their tourism use hinges on careful interpretation, visitor-management and dispersal, and integration with local livelihoods (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). These assets play a fundamental role not only in the preservation of cultural identity but also in the tourism sector, which is an important component of the national economy. Economically, heritage is embedded in a tourism sector that is a significant component of the national economy—e.g., travel and tourism generated an estimated €215 billion in Italy in 2023—while policy debates increasingly focus on balancing access with conservation to mitigate overtourism pressures (Stamegna et al., 2024).

Table 19. UNESCO Sites by Italian Region

S.No.	Site	Location (province)	Year listed
1	18th-Century Royal Palace at Caserta with the Park, the Aqueduct of Vanvitelli, and the San Leucio Complex	Caserta and Benevento	1997
2	Amalfi Coast (Costiera Amalfitana)	Salerno	1997
3	Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe*	several sites	2017
4	Arab-Norman Palermo and the Cathedral Churches of Cefalù and Monreale	Metropolitan City of Palermo	2015
5	Archaeological Area and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia	Udine	1998
6	Archaeological Area of Agrigento	Agrigento	1997
7	Archaeological Areas of Pompei, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata	Metropolitan City of Naples	1997
8	Assisi, the Basilica of San Francesco and Other Franciscan Sites	Perugia	2000
9	Botanical Garden (Orto Botanico), Padua	Padua	1997
10	Castel del Monte	Barletta-Andria-Trani	1996
11	Cathedral, Torre Civica and Piazza Grande, Modena	Modena	1997
12	Church and Dominican Convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie with "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci	Metropolitan City of Milan	1980
13	Cilento and Vallo di Diano National Park with the Archeological sites of Paestum and Velia, and the Certosa di Padula	Salerno	1998

14	City of Verona	Verona	2000
15	City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto	Padua, Rovigo, Treviso, Metropolitan City of Venice, Verona, Vicenza	1994
16	Crespi d'Adda	Bergamo	1995
17	Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna	Ravenna	1996
18	Etruscan Necropolises of Cerveteri and Tarquinia	Viterbo, Metropolitan City of Rome Capital	2004
19	Ferrara, City of the Renaissance, and its Po Delta	Ferrara	1995
20	Genoa: Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli	Metropolitan City of Genoa	2006
21	Historic Centre of Florence	Metropolitan City of Florence	1982
22	Historic Centre of Naples	Metropolitan City of Naples	1995
23	Historic Centre of Rome, the Properties of the Holy See in that City Enjoying Extraterritorial Rights and San Paolo Fuori le Mura	Metropolitan City of Rome Capital	1980
24	Historic Centre of San Gimignano	Siena	1990
25	Historic Centre of Siena	Siena	1995
26	Historic Centre of the City of Pienza	Siena	1996
27	Historic Centre of Urbino	Pesaro and Urbino	1998
28	Isole Eolie (Aeolian Islands)	Messina	2000
29	Ivrea, Industrial City of the 20th Century	Metropolitan City of Turin	2018
30	Late Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto (South-Eastern Sicily)	Catania, Ragusa, Syracuse	2002
31	Longobards in Italy. Places of the power (568-774 A.D.)	several sites	2011
32	Mantua and Sabbioneta	Mantua	2008
33	Medici Villas and Gardens in Tuscany	several sites	2013
34	Monte San Giorgio	Varese	2010
35	Mount Etna	Catania	2013
36	Padua's fourteenth-century fresco cycles	Padua	2021
37	Piazza del Duomo, Pisa	Pisa	1987
38	Portovenere, Cinque Terre, and the Islands (Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto)	La Spezia	1997
39	Prehistoric Pile dwellings around the Alps	several sites	2011
40	Residences of the Royal House of Savoy	Metropolitan City of Turin, Cuneo	1997
41	Rhaetian Railway in the Albula / Bernina Landscapes	Sondrio	2008
42	Rock Drawings in Valcamonica	Brescia	1979
43	Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy	several sites	2003
44	Su Nuraxi di Barumini	South Sardinia	1997

45	Syracuse and the Rocky Necropolis of Pantalica	Syracuse	2005
46	The Dolomites	several sites	2009
47	The Great Spa Towns of Europe	Pistoia	2021
48	The Porticoes of Bologna	Metropolitan City of Bologna	2021
49	The Prosecco Hills of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene. ("Le Colline del Prosecco di Conegliano e Valdobbiadene")	Treviso	2019
50	The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera	Matera	1993
51	The Trulli of Alberobello	Bari	1996
52	Val d'Orcia	Siena	2004
53	Venetian Works of Defence between the 16th and 17th centuries: Stato da Terra – Western Stato da Mar	Bergamo, Udine, Verona	2017
54	Venice and its Lagoon	Metropolitan City of Venice	1987
55	Villa Adriana, Tivoli	Metropolitan City of Rome Capital	1999
56	Villa d'Este, Tivoli	Metropolitan City of Rome Capital	2001
57	Villa Romana del Casale	Enna	1997
58	Vineyard Landscape of Piedmont: Langhe-Roero and Monferrato	Alessandria, Asti, Cuneo	2014
59	Montecatini Terme, historical thermal centre in Tuscany	Tuscany	2021
60	The Reggia of Caserta: sumptuous triumph of Italian Baroque	Napoli	1997

Source: (ITALIA.IT, 2025)

Italy has a diverse intangible cultural heritage recognized by UNESCO, encompassing diverse practices, knowledge, and craftsmanship (Table 20). Italy's Mediterranean diet, and culinary traditions, such as the Neapolitan "Pizzaiuolo" (Pizzaiuolo), which embody both skill and community identity, are significant in its intangible heritage assets. Performing arts include the ornate puppet theater of Sicily, the Opera dei Pupi, the polyphonic song "Canto a Tenore" of Sardinia, and the practice of operatic singing in Italy. Italy's artisanal heritage includes traditional violin making in Cremona and glass bead making in Venice. Finally, seasonal and environmental practices, such as dry-stone walling and traditional irrigation knowledge, contribute to Italy's cultural and sustainable interaction with the landscape (UNESCO, 2025g).

Table 20. Italy's Intangible cultural heritage elements inscribed on the UNESCO representative list

Heritage Element	Brief Description
Opera dei Pupi (Sicilian puppet theatre)	Traditional marionette theatre depicting chivalric and historical narratives.
Canto a tenore (Sardinian pastoral songs)	Polyphonic folk singing from Sardinia.
Traditional violin craftsmanship in Cremona	Centuries-old violin-making techniques from Cremona.
Celebrations of big shoulder-borne processional structures	Religious festivals featuring large votive structures carried on shoulders.
Mediterranean diet	Traditional dietary practices across Mediterranean countries.
Traditional agricultural practice of cultivating the "vite ad alberello" (Pantelleria bush vines)	Indigenous vine-growing methods on the island of Pantelleria
Art of Neapolitan 'Pizzaiuolo'	Skillful pizza-making tradition from Naples.
Celestinian forgiveness celebration (Perdonanza Celestiniana)	Annual Catholic jubilee held in L'Aquila since 1294.
Alpinism	Mountaineering as a cultural practice.
Musical art of horn players	Performance technique using horns, linked to singing and conviviality.
Art of glass beads	Venetian glass-bead craftsmanship.
Truffle hunting and extraction in Italy	Traditional truffle hunting and harvesting methods.
Falconry, a living human heritage	Ancient practice of training birds of prey for hunting.
Transhumance (seasonal droving of livestock)	Seasonal livestock migration along traditional routes.
Traditional irrigation: knowledge, technique and organization	Community-based traditional irrigation systems.
The practice of opera singing in Italy	Operatic singing traditions and pedagogy in Italy.
Art of dry-stone construction, knowledge and techniques	Building structures with stones, without mortar.
Manual bell ringing	Community tradition of ringing bells by hand.

Source: (UNESCO, 2024d)

4.3.4. Challenges for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Italy

Italy, with its rich cultural and natural heritage, faces several challenges in developing sustainable cultural heritage tourism, as do other countries. Cities prominent in tourism, such as Venice, Rome, and Florence, in particular, struggle with overtourism. The increasing number of visitors in these cities, the erosion of Venice's canals, and the structural stress of the Colosseum are causing physical damage to the monuments (UNESCO, 2021b). The rise in tourist

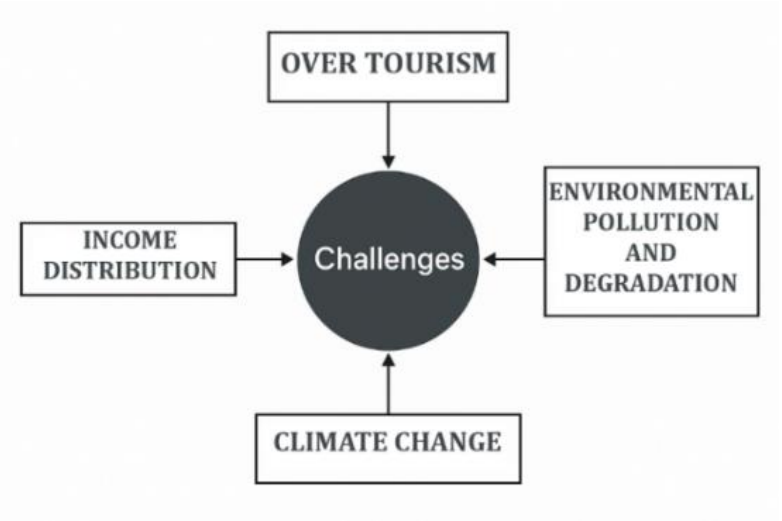
numbers generates significant apprehensions over the near- and long-term sustainability of enormous influxes, termed overtourism, which harms and even obliterates tourist heritage sites. Italian towns where tangible heritage tourism is in great demand are suffering from environmental deterioration, infrastructural pressure, and a decline in travel satisfaction for heritage tourism participants (Popp, 2012; Guardian, 2019). In addition, the seasonal demand intensity worsens the problem, creates infrastructural inadequacy, and reduces the quality of life of the local people (Séraphin & Yallop, 2021).

Environmental pollution and degradation are another major problem for Italy. The concentration of tourists has caused pollution in the destination. The Venetian lagoon suffers from water pollution, and the surroundings of historic buildings struggle with waste management (Bertocchi et al., 2020). In addition, the increasing carbon footprint, especially from ships and air travel, contradicts Italy's sustainable tourism goals (Muhammad Zahid Nawaz et al., 2023). Natural heritage sites such as Cinque Terre and Pompeii cause uncontrolled pedestrian traffic, requiring stricter visitor policies (Osanna & Rinaldi, 2018).

Income distribution is another important problem in tourism. It is known that tourism revenues generally flow to capital owners, with lower-income households benefiting less than higher-income households (Carrascal Incera & Fernández, 2015). From an economic perspective, tourism revenue leakage undermines local benefits, as international companies often profit more than Italian communities (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Rural heritage sites, such as in Basilicata and Calabria, remain underdeveloped compared to urban attractions, creating regional imbalances (Bencivenga et al., 2017; Salvatore et al., 2021). Due to the widespread commercialization brought about by the commodification of cultural products, historical sites are now compromising the authenticity of local products to satisfy tourists' expectations (Albrino, 2025). Rising housing costs due to short-term rentals are displacing local people, a phenomenon evident in Venice and Florence, where it has become difficult for locals to rent a home in the city (Celata & Romano, 2022).

Climate change is an existential threat to heritage sites because rising sea levels endanger coastal heritage areas such as the Venetian, and the increasing extreme weather events damage the ancient structures. Venice, which is on the UNESCO World Heritage List, is one of the most sensitive areas because frequent ACQUA Alta (high tide) floods leaving historical structures under the water, such as San Marco Basilica. According to Reimann et al. (2018), if the current climate tendencies continue until 2100, Venice, Ravenna and Amalfi coast, including the UNESCO areas in the Mediterranean coastal floods and erosion are at high risk. In addition to water raids, increasing temperatures and intensified storms are a threat to ancient structures, causing material deterioration. Since uncoordinated administration between local, national, and international institutions delays protection attempts, governance difficulties make sustainability efforts even more complex (Licciardi & Administrative, 2019). For example, Venice's Mose flood barrier project, designed to protect the city, has been delayed due to conflicts on financing and environmental impact assessments (Giupponi et al., 2024). Figure 17 illustrates the main challenges to heritage sustainability in Italy. At the center is "Challenges," surrounded by four key factors: over tourism, environmental pollution and degradation, climate change, and income distribution. These elements represent the primary obstacles that hinder the preservation and sustainable management of cultural heritage in the country.

Figure 17. Challenges to Heritage Sustainability in Italy



Source: (Researchers' own creation)

4.3.5. Success Factors for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Italy

Protecting Italy's historical and cultural resources is a key success factor for sustainable heritage tourism development. In this process, Italy's involvement with local communities enhances both social inclusion and enriches tourism experiences. Sustainable tourism policies and effective governance ensure orderly and equitable implementation, while innovative regulatory approaches and digital transformation strengthen heritage accessibility and management. Authentic and diverse experiences also increase visitor participation and satisfaction. Education and awareness campaigns encourage responsible and thoughtful participation from both locals and tourists. These are discussed in more detail below:

✓ ***Preservation & Conservation of Heritage Sites***

Continuous and significant investment is needed to combat the decay caused by time, weather events, pollution, and past damage. Maintaining structures in good condition requires careful work. Seismic strengthening is being done at the Colosseum (Como & Como, 2017), for instance; restoration of structures damaged by eruptions and delicate frescoes is being done at Pompeii (Sparice et al., 2024); and ongoing work in Venice involves safeguarding buildings and foundations against collapse and water damage (Meade, 2023; Zaccariello et al., 2024). Strategies to reduce the physical impacts of tourism, such as abrasion, vibration, and humidity, are necessary to strike a balance between conservation and public access. Timed tickets, visitor limits to regulate the number of visitors, and digital tools like virtual tours are important strategies. These techniques improve accessibility, lessen the strain on delicate regions, and create a learning environment for heritage communication. Climate change is posing a growing threat to heritage sites through erosion, flooding, rising sea levels, and extreme weather. It is essential to take proactive adaptation measures. Examples include initiatives to prevent accelerated erosion in coastal regions worldwide and Venice's MOSE barrier system, which fights the Acqua Alta (Faranda et al., 2023). Engineering solutions, monitoring, and occasionally tough choices like managed retreat are all part of these endeavors.

✓ ***Community Involvement***

A critical success factor for sustainable heritage tourism in Italy is genuine local empowerment. Moving beyond symbolic consultations, this involves actively involving residents and community representatives in tourism development and site management planning and decision-making processes within their regions. Whether in the Cinque Terre, the historic centers of Rome and Florence, or lesser-known villages like Alberobello or Civita di Bagnoregio, empowering local voices to shape strategies—from visitor flow management to infrastructure development—ensures that tourism better meets the needs of local communities. This increases ownership, reduces conflict, and aligns tourism growth with the community's long-term well-being and heritage vision.

Meaningful economic involvement for local communities is essential for long-term success (Basile et al., 2021). Targeted resources, capacity building, and market access are necessary for this process in order to reach local Italian tour operators, small businesses, family-run Agriturismo enterprises, and artisans (such as glassblowers, leatherworkers, and ceramicists). Agriturismo, Italy's distinctive form of farm tourism, integrates agricultural activities with accommodation services, offering tourists or visitors authentic experiences in a rural setting. By allowing tourists to stay on working farms, participate in local food production and consumption, and interact with traditional practices, agriturismo provides direct economic benefits for local communities while preserving cultural and environmental heritage (Sonnino, 2004). This model promotes sustainability on multiple levels: it generates meaningful income for small-scale farmers and artisans or SMEs (Lupi et al., 2017), encourages the maintenance of traditional agricultural methods (Tedioli, 2025), reduces urban migration by providing sustainable rural livelihoods (Knežević et al., 2025), and promotes low-impact tourism that connects visitors to local ecosystems (Tew and Barbieri, 2012). In essence, agriturismo not only strengthens local economies but also cultural identity and environmental management, making it a cornerstone of sustainable heritage tourism in Italy.

Tourism helps to preserve the distinctive character of Italian destinations by allowing these local business owners to prosper and uphold the authenticity of their offerings, which range from handcrafted goods to guided tours that share extensive local knowledge. By guaranteeing that communities receive an equitable portion of the tourism industry's profits, it prevents economic leakage and establishes a direct link between the prosperity of the tourism sector and the enhancement of local livelihoods throughout the peninsula.

In the Italian context, using tourism to revitalize culture is essential to success (Turčinović et al., 2025). Authentic regional cuisine based on Slow Food principles, lively local celebrations and festivals (like the Siena Palio, the Infiorata flower festival, and historical reenactments), and traditional Italian arts and crafts (like Sardinian weaving, Venetian lace, or Sicilian puppet theater) can all be promoted through sustainable tourism. These efforts align with the Slow City (Cittaslow) movement, founded in Italy in 1999 as an extension of Slow Food, which emphasizes quality of life, cultural authenticity, and sustainable local economies (Mayer & Knox, 2006). Cittaslows seeks to protect old buildings, encourage eco-friendly travel, assist regional craftspeople, and lessen traffic and noise. These principles directly enhance cultural preservation (Pink, 2008). For example, towns like Orvieto and Bra have used the Cittaslow model to revitalize historic centers, promote farm-to-table cuisine, and organize workshops on disappearing crafts, ensuring that tourism maintains local identity rather than corrupting it (Zawadzka, 2017; Interreg Europe, 2020). Actively supporting local practitioners (musicians, chefs, artisans, festival organizers) helps preserve intangible cultural heritage. Tourism is a force for cultural preservation because of these kinds of activities, which not only produce

richer, more genuine visitor experiences but also boost community pride, promote knowledge transfer between generations, and actively revive the vibrant culture that is an essential part of Italy's cultural heritage (Cavicchi et al., 2013; Cerquetti et al., 2022).

✓ ***Sustainable Tourism Policies & Governance***

The Italian Ministry of Culture (MiC), the Italian National Tourism Board (ENIT), UNESCO, and regional governments collaborate effectively to ensure success. This ensures coherent strategies for conservation, visitor management, infrastructure, and marketing at all levels of government. Effective and stringent regulations (e.g., visitor restrictions, prohibitions on harmful behavior, and monitoring illegal rentals) and consistent enforcement are critical to combating overtourism and preserving heritage sites. Venice's tourist tax and access costs are examples of this proactive approach. Venice's tourist taxes and access fees are proposed as a solution to reduce the negative impacts of overtourism, such as pollution, traffic, and cultural degradation, and to promote quality, sustainable tourism. The proposed system involves introducing access fees for tourists arriving on certain carriers (e.g., cruise ships) and going to certain restricted areas in the city (e.g., St. Mark's Square) in order to ensure that all tourists contribute to city development and regulation expenditures (Tosi & Bagarotto, 2021). The collection of taxes and access fees could help tourist destinations to better assess the impact of policies for sustainable, quality tourism and to design strategies to manage mass movement more accurately, ultimately contributing to the sustainable development of Venice (Bertocchi, 2020). An entrance tax will be implemented for day trippers visiting the historic center starting in 2025. The tax is €5 for those over 14 and is applied between 8:30 AM and 4:00 PM on 54 designated days from April to July. To avoid this tax, visitors must stay at least one night in a hotel or other accommodation within the municipality of Venice, as this fee is already included in the accommodation cost (it ranges from €1 to €5 per person per night, charged until the fifth day). Exemptions are also granted to residents, students, property owners, and business travelers. Children under 14, people with disabilities, and their companions are also exempt, but even so, everyone must register on the official website (https://cda.ve.it/en/) to receive a free QR code. The municipality introduced this tax to manage tourist crowds, maintain the city's infrastructure, and help fund essential maintenance like waste collection and street and bridge repairs (VeneziaUnica City Pass, 2014; Visit Venice Italy, 2024).

Success requires encouraging private investment in heritage conservation (e.g., restoration projects) through well-structured Strategic Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) and strong public oversight to ensure conservation standards, public access, and cultural integrity are maintained (Torrieri et al., 2025).

✓ ***Innovation & Digital Transformation***

In Italy, the use of AI-powered crowd management systems, predictive analytics at the Colosseum or the Uffizi, the use of augmented reality experiences to bring ruins like Pompeii or ancient Rome to life without physical contact, and the creation of digital narratives through "Heritage on Demand" apps (Vrettakis et al., 2019) help preserve heritage sites. These enhance visitor understanding and experience while reducing physical pressure on the sites. Effectively utilizing big data analytics is crucial to understand visitation patterns, optimize visitor flows, design efficient pathways, and proactively mitigate congestion at hotspots across Italy, from Venice's canals to Florence's historic center (Attanasio et al., 2022). Data informs smarter, real-time management decisions. Success also depends on implementing and promoting sustainable transport in sensitive historic urban areas. This includes expanding walking tours, introducing electric shuttles, for example, in hilltop towns or at major archaeological sites like Ostia Antica,

and establishing bike-sharing systems to reduce traffic congestion, pollution, and the physical impact on fragile infrastructure (Balletto et al., 2019; Karivieri, 2020).

✓ ***Authentic & Diversified Experiences***

In Italy, destinations like Matera's ancient Sassi or Renaissance Urbino stand out as rural destinations. This balances pressure on key destinations, distributes economic benefits more widely, and provides visitors with deeper, more unconventional experiences. This dissemination strategy is vital for regional equity and reducing overtourism. Creating and developing rich, thematic cultural routes is key to fostering meaningful engagement (Cillis & Statuto, 2018). Travelers are immersed in Italy's varied landscapes, customs, and local communities via routes like the famed Via Francigena pilgrimage route or specialty Wine Heritage Tours, which promote real connection and understanding beyond generic sightseeing (Forlani et al., 2024). Encouraging slower, more conscious travel patterns is crucial. This includes encouraging longer stays, promoting "Agriturismo" (authentic farm stays featuring local cuisine and culture), and developing environmentally responsible accommodations. Slow tourism reduces the environmental impact per visitor, deepens cultural interaction, supports rural economies, and extends visits beyond peak seasons (Giaccio et al., 2018).

✓ ***Education & Awareness***

Campaigns like Rome's "Don't Sit on the Steps" (protecting historic monuments like the Spanish Steps) are crucial. These efforts, often leveraging digital tools and on-site signage, foster responsible tourism, minimizing physical damage, littering, and disrespectful behavior, directly contributing to site preservation and enhancing the experience for all (Giuffrida, 2019). Ensuring long-term sustainability requires integrating heritage studies into formal education. Success involves educational institutions (schools, universities) actively including legacy studies in curricula. This cultivates a generation of informed future custodians – local citizens, professionals, and policymakers – who deeply understand the value, fragility, and management needs of Italy's cultural patrimony, fostering a culture of preservation from within (Ascenzi et al., 2019; Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). Driving industry-wide best practices necessitates recognizing and incentivizing sustainability. Success relies on credible sustainable certification schemes like "Bandiera Arancione" (Orange Flag for inland tourism quality/sustainability) and "Green Key" (eco-label for accommodations). Identifying and promoting hotels, tour operators, and locations that meet these standards helps tourists make responsible choices, rewards sustainable businesses, and sets clear benchmarks for environmental and socio-cultural performance across the sector (Mangano & Ugolini, 2020; Serio et al., 2024).

4.3.6. Recommended Practices for Italy

Italy's heritage tourism, despite its several UNESCO World Heritage sites, encounters challenges, including the substantial maintenance costs associated with overtourism and regional economic disparities, typical of any popular destination. Substantial prospects for the sector encompass the increasing demand for alternative tourism modalities, including gastronomy and rural tourism, as well as the implementation of sustainability requirements. Nonetheless, considerable challenges persist, including global economic swings, crises, climate change risks to heritage places, and the commodification of culture. The SWOT analysis indicates that robust national and EU legislation, along with technology infrastructure, provide opportunities; yet, issues such as bureaucratic obstacles and insufficient collaboration among stakeholders require resolution. To analyze the overall potential of Italy's heritage tourism, Table 21 illustrates the SWOT analysis, which is based on economic, social, environmental, cultural, legal, and political, technical, cooperative, and institutional factors:

Table 21. SWOT-Heritage Tourism in Italy

Category	Strengths	Weaknesses
Economic	- High tourism revenue due to numerous UNESCO heritage sites- Direct contribution to GDP	- High maintenance and infrastructure costs from overtourism- Regional economic imbalance (North vs. South)
Social	- High public awareness of cultural heritage- Experienced and tourism-supportive local communities	- Quality of life issues for locals in high-traffic areas- Limited youth engagement in heritage-related careers
Environmental	- Integration of natural and cultural heritage (e.g., Amalfi Coast, Cinque Terre)- Existing legal framework for environmental and heritage protection	- Environmental degradation caused by mass tourism- Urbanization pressure on coasts and rural heritage landscapes
Cultural	- Rich historical legacy (Roman, Renaissance, Medieval heritage)- Strong integration with art, gastronomy, and traditional lifestyle	- Underpromotion of some cultural elements- Risk of superficial "heritage consumption"
Legal & Political	- Strong national heritage protection laws- EU-aligned policies and access to cultural funding	- Bureaucratic inefficiencies- Lack of coordination among local authorities
Technological	- Use of digital guides, virtual tours, and AR/VR in museums and sites- Growing smart tourism infrastructure	- Inadequate digital infrastructure in some areas- Insufficient data collection and visitor profiling
Institutional & Collaborative	- Strong partnerships with UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM- Public-private-civil society cooperation models in heritage governance	- Limited knowledge-sharing between stakeholders- Absence of sustainable management plans in certain heritage sites

Category	Opportunities	Threats
Economic	- Diversification through alternative heritage tourism (gastronomy, rural, creative tourism)- Rising demand for sustainable tourism	- Global economic fluctuations affecting tourism- Overreliance on peak seasons
Social	- Community-based tourism models increasing local involvement- Digital transfer of cultural knowledge to younger generations	- Overtourism-related tensions between locals and tourists- Vandalism or neglect due to low social responsibility
Environmental	- Adoption of sustainability standards in heritage site management- Integrated planning of natural and cultural tourism	- Climate change threatening coastal and open-air sites- High-carbon tourism activities
Cultural	- Strategic use of UNESCO branding in promotion- Integration of traditional crafts and intangible heritage into tourism	- Over-commercialization of culture- Erosion of local identity under mass tourism pressures

Legal & Political	- Alignment with European Green Deal and sustainable heritage policies- Access to international grants and EU cultural funds	- Outdated legislation in need of reform- Political instability potentially disrupting investments
Technological	- Use of AI-powered smart guide systems and virtual archives- Increased accessibility through digital content	- Shallow cultural experiences through digital-only tourism- Cybersecurity risks for digital heritage inventories
Institutional & Collaborative	- Expansion of public-private partnerships (PPP) in heritage projects- Stronger collaborations with universities and NGOs for training and planning	- Role overlaps and communication issues between stakeholders- Institutional weaknesses (staff, funding, training gaps)

When examining Italy's cultural heritage tourism potential through a SWOT analysis, it seems possible to develop various strategic and tactical recommendations in line with sustainable development principles. First, Italy's strengths—rich UNESCO heritage sites, deep-rooted cultural history, and extensive tourism experience—can be integrated with sustainable and digital tourism trends to create new sustainable opportunities. In this regard, applications such as virtual tours, augmented reality, and digital guidance systems are recommended to make cultural sites more accessible, while also shifting the tourist burden from major cities to rural areas. Furthermore, integrating gastronomy, handicrafts, and traditional lifestyles into cultural heritage and strengthening the destination's identity is a significant strategy.

Conversely, to address weaknesses such as economic instability, youth disinterest, and tourism pressure on residents, it is recommended to expand community-based tourism models and increase digital heritage education for younger generations. In regions like Southern Italy, which benefit less from tourism, increasing infrastructure investments, educating residents, and ensuring their active participation in tourism are among the effective strategies to reduce regional inequalities. Italy's strengths can also be an effective defense against external threats such as commercialization and climate change, which threaten cultural heritage. In this context, cultural authenticity should be preserved through visitor restrictions, carrying capacity practices, and experience-based tourism products developed in collaboration with the local community. Furthermore, protective measures against climate change should be taken in coastal areas, and heritage values should be securely archived digitally and passed on to future generations.

Finally, some of Italy's weaknesses and external threats can be addressed through a holistic national heritage tourism strategy. Establishing a centralized structure to coordinate local governments, creating digital databases to support decision-making processes, and implementing smart monitoring systems are recommended. This is expected to address information gaps, leading to more transparent, participatory, and sustainable heritage management. All of these strategies can enhance Italy's cultural heritage tourism. Furthermore, they can both enhance the well-being of local communities and ensure their continued transmission to future generations. These strategies are summarized below:

✓ ***Promoting Sustainable Tourism Models:***

Increasing the participation of local communities by directing visitors to cultural heritage sites outside traditional tourist centers to reduce overtourism pressure. This approach will distribute visitor flows more equitably and strengthen local economies.

✓ ***Effective Governance and Legal Enforcement:***

Enforcing current conservation regulations and creating strong governance systems that ensure openness and accountability are crucial. All parties, encompassing local communities, cultural institutions, tourism operators, and policymakers, must adhere to these standards.

✓ ***Improving Visitor Management Practices:***

Visitor management practices such as timed tickets, capacity limits, and digital reservation systems should be developed to minimize overcrowding and physical stress on heritage assets.

✓ ***Improving Digital Infrastructure and Utilizing Innovations:***

Investing in technologies such as digital guides, virtual tours, and augmented reality (AR) applications to enrich the tourist experience. Furthermore, by collecting visitor data more effectively, we provide better visitor management and personalized experiences.

✓ ***Diversifying Cultural Heritage Financing:***

Innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships, heritage bonds, and tourism taxes are vital to ensuring a stable and sustainable flow of resources for the preservation and development of Italy's cultural heritage.

✓ ***Increasing Stakeholder Collaboration:***

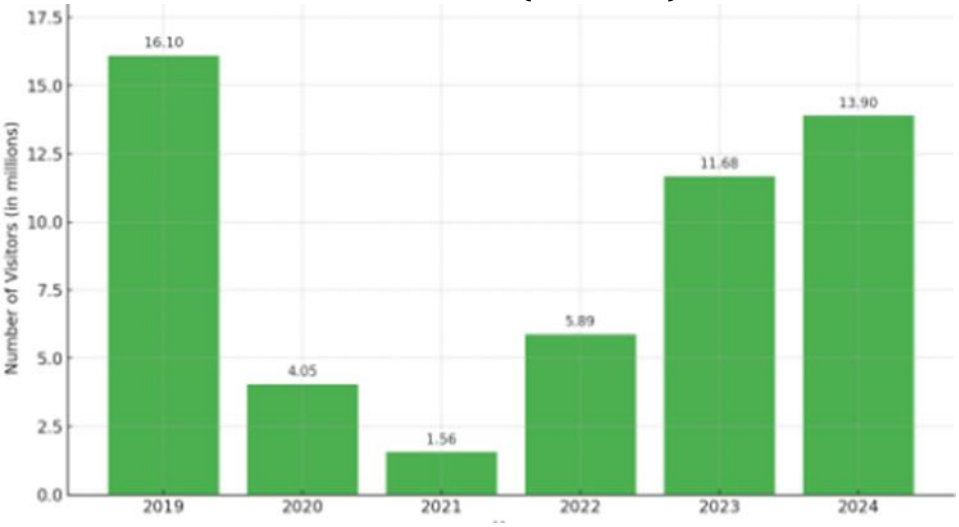
Establishing mechanisms to enhance knowledge sharing and coordination among the public, private, and civil society organizations. Providing the necessary knowledge and skills for heritage management through stronger partnerships with universities and civil society organizations.

4.4. Case Country: Indonesia

4.4.1. General Outlook of Heritage Tourism in Indonesia

Heritage tourism in Indonesia possesses immense potential due to the nation's vast cultural and historical wealth, dispersed across the archipelago. As a country with thousands of cultural sites, including ten recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Indonesia has a strong foundation to develop this sector as a pillar of sustainable tourism. Furthermore, as an active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Indonesia bears both a moral and strategic responsibility to demonstrate leadership in preserving and leveraging its Islamic and non-Islamic cultural heritage, reflecting the nation's historical plurality. However, to date, the recording and reporting system for tourist data, particularly those specifically visiting cultural heritage sites, remains highly limited. The absence of integrated and standardized data hampers evidence-based evaluation, planning, and policymaking in heritage tourism management. Meanwhile, general statistics on international tourist arrivals can be observed in the following graph.

Figure 18. International Tourist Arrivals to Indonesia (2019-2024)



Source: (GoodStats, 2024)

Although Indonesia has recorded a significant surge in international tourist arrivals between 2019 and 2024, rising from 16.1 million visits in 2019, plummeting to 1.56 million in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and recovering to 13.9 million in 2024 (GoodStats, 2024), specific data on visits to cultural heritage sites, whether UNESCO-recognized or nationally registered, remains severely limited. This gap in critical information hinders the formulation of sustainable and measurable heritage tourism development strategies. Nationally, Indonesia leads Southeast Asia with 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2025). However, official statistics on visitor numbers, particularly foreign tourists to each of these sites, are not routinely or comprehensively published by institutions such as the Ministry of Tourism (*Kemenpar*) or the Central Statistics Agency (*BPS*). Currently available data tends to focus on flagship sites. For instance, Borobudur Temple records an average of 4.6 million annual visits, yet only about 10% are foreign tourists (Kemdikbud, 2022). Prambanan Temple attracted over 208,000 foreign visitors and nearly two million domestic tourists in 2016. Meanwhile, the Sangiran Early Man Site received approximately 405,000 visitors in 2018 (BPSMP Sangiran, 2022). In contrast, the majority of other cultural sites lack systematically documented visitation statistics. This significant disparity in data collection reflects inconsistencies in documentation and information governance systems. Of the approximately 90,000 cultural heritage buildings and sites in Indonesia, only around 1,500 are actively managed by local governments (Asatu News, 2023), indicating that most cultural heritage sites remain poorly monitored in terms of visitor numbers, ecological impact, or potential tourism development. In particular, based on the qualitative data analysis, the key challenges to Indonesian heritage tourism development relate to site management plans. In this regard, **P15:** *"The most effective tool is the site management plan, which includes early planning before the site is opened to tourists. It covers access, security, visitor profiles, and disaster management."*

Particularly, the absence of a holistic recording system has prevented heritage tourism management from addressing critical aspects such as visitor capacity regulation, environmental impact mitigation, local community empowerment, and research and innovation development. Notably, UNESCO has developed tools like the Visitor Management Assessment Tool (VMAT) to help measure and sustainably manage visits to heritage sites (BPSMP Sangiran, 2022). However, its adoption remains limited to select sites. For example, Borobudur Temple now enforces a

daily visitor cap of 1,200 people as part of its conservation efforts (Kemdikbud, 2022). As per qualitative data analysis, one of the Indonesian participants (i.e., **P15**) mentioned: *"[...] Following such designation, the government should implement preservation policies that include appointing site custodians or caretakers. These individuals play a vital role in maintaining the integrity of the site, especially once it becomes a tourist attraction and is subject to increased visitor pressure. This administrative strategy helps prevent physical degradation and ensures that cultural values are sustained over time."*

To better understand foreign tourist behavior, measuring average spending per visit is crucial in assessing a country's tourism quality. This data not only reflects the economic potential of each visit but also serves as a foundation for targeted promotional strategies, market segmentation, and tourism product development. An infographic compiled by the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy illustrates the trend in average foreign tourist expenditures from 2015 to 2024, including a breakdown by country of origin in 2024, as presented in the following infographic.

Figure 19. International Tourist per visit year 2015-2024

The presented infographic shows the trend of average expenditure per visit by foreign tourists to Indonesia during the 2015-2024 period. Overall, there were significant fluctuations, with the highest peak in 2021 reaching USD 3,097.41, most likely due to the very low number of tourists during the pandemic, with the majority being high-spending tourists who stayed longer. Subsequently, expenditure gradually declined to USD 1,391.85 in 2024, which is relatively higher than pre-pandemic levels (only USD 1,145.64 in 2019), but still far below the extreme 2021 figure 19. This means that while visitor numbers have significantly recovered post-pandemic, the quality of visits in terms of spending per tourist has not fully stabilized. Furthermore, the data also shows significant variations in average expenditure by tourists' country of origin. Tourists from countries like the United States (USD 2,183.58), Germany (USD 2,038.74), and the Netherlands (USD 1,929.50) had much higher spending per visit compared to tourists from neighboring countries like Malaysia (USD 693.07) or Singapore (USD 707.69). This provides a strategic signal for managers of cultural heritage destinations in Indonesia that tourist markets from Western Europe and North America, which have a high interest in culture and history, also have strong purchasing power and should therefore be primary targets in heritage tourism development.

Heritage tourism is a strategic sector that can drive sustainable development, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. Properly managed heritage destinations have the potential to create jobs, generate foreign exchange, and promote the preservation of local culture. In Indonesia, several UNESCO World Heritage Sites and regional cultural heritage destinations have become major tourist attractions. However, heritage tourism also brings serious challenges: vulnerability to over-visitation, environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and unequal economic benefits for local communities (Praptika, 2024). A study by Brooks et al. (2023) observed that heritage tourism has positive impacts on the economy and cultural rejuvenation, but it can also lead to negative effects such as displacement of residents, increased crime, and erosion of cultural values if not managed inclusively. Therefore, applying the principles of sustainable tourism is crucial so that "the success of heritage tourism depends on the inclusion of host communities in governance and decision-making processes". Following that idea, most participants from the qualitative data analysis noted the importance of having the host community support in improving and safeguarding the quality of the heritage tourism sites. In this regard, **P12**: *"Solutions include communicating the importance of heritage to communities as the guardians of their regions, with a focus on youth for regeneration, and the enforcement and supervision of strict regulations."*

Table 22. Mean ratings of heritage tourism sustainability conditions in Indonesia

Sustainability of heritage tourism in Indonesia	**M**
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.	4,07
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.	3,98
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).	3,69
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.	3,61
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.	3,59

Table 22 illustrates that the sustainability of Indonesia's heritage tourism is generally viewed in a positive light, with strong scores for policy and community benefits. The highest mean score of 4.07 for "Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices" suggests that the country's policies are effective in fostering environmentally conscious tourism. Additionally, with a mean score of 3.98, local communities are seen to be economically benefiting from heritage tourism. However, the data also highlights key areas for improvement. The lowest mean score of 3.59 is for "Visitor management policies are effectively implemented," indicating that managing tourist flow, carrying capacity, and waste remains a challenge. Similarly, the score of 3.61 for "Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected" suggests that while efforts are being made, there is room for improvement in safeguarding these sites from various threats. In summary, Indonesia is succeeding in laying a sustainable foundation through policy and community engagement, but the practical implementation of visitor management and site preservation requires further attention.

The findings indicate that stakeholders perceive heritage tourism sustainability in Indonesia to be good in key aspects (site protection, community benefits, pro-environment policies). This reflects the results of various programs in recent years, such as cultural heritage restoration projects, development of eco-friendly amenities at heritage destinations, and dissemination of responsible tourism principles to industry players. However, behind these achievements lie

structural challenges that must be addressed. Lack of funding and weak law enforcement emerge as two critical and interrelated issues. When preservation budgets are limited, site managers often must prioritize minimally, leaving some conservation duties neglected, for instance, a lack of regular monitoring due to cost. Conversely, even when funds are available, without strict oversight, spending may not effectively protect heritage.

One of the participants from qualitative analysis exemplified this in an interview: "*There was a regional budget for temple protection, but due to poor coordination, it wasn't optimally used. Instead, an illegal building popped up in a protected zone." That case shows the importance of cross-sector integration: the cultural office, tourism office, local enforcement, and community must share a vision for heritage stewardship."* (**P10**) A governance study by Kusumah (2024) also suggested a single-window model in managing destinations, involving all stakeholders from the planning stage.

4.4.2. Development and Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Indonesia

In the last decade, Indonesia's heritage tourism has undergone significant evolution, marked by a shift from state-controlled top-down approaches to more participatory community-based models. A study in the Majapahit Trowulan area revealed that collaborative governance between local governments, communities, and cultural organizations has proven effective in preserving traditional architecture while promoting sustainable cultural destination development (Basyar et al., 2025).

The distinct characteristics of Indonesian heritage destinations include the integration of tangible and intangible heritage, where promotion strategies consistently highlight local cultural values such as traditions, colonial architecture, rituals, and handicrafts. For instance, UNESCO-recognized Madurese batik serves as both a cultural heritage symbol and a tourist attraction (UNESCO, 2009). Additionally, research on Penglipuran tourist village in Bali highlights the successful implementation of community-based tourism since 1993, managed collectively by the traditional village (*desa adat*) through a village-owned enterprise (*Badan Usaha Milik Desa*). This model includes a homestay rotation system, ensuring that tourism benefits are evenly shared among households and equitable distribution of the village income. The approach has generated multiple benefits, improved local livelihoods, enhanced public facilities funded by tourism revenue, strengthened cultural preservation, and sustained environmental quality, while maintaining the community's traditional spatial layout, architecture, and customary rules (Briliyanti, 2021).

Since 1993, Penglipuran Tourist Village in Bali has stood as a 32-months (about 2 and a half years) example of successful community-based tourism, managed through a well-structured and sustainable governance model. Management is coordinated by the Village Government and the Traditional Council, which enforce strict regulations on preserving traditional Balinese architecture; the Penglipuran Tourism Management Board, responsible for visitor services and environmental management; active participation of all residents in various roles (homestay owners, tour guides, artisans, and service providers); support from the Bangli Regency Government for infrastructure and promotion; and collaboration with NGOs and academic institutions for training and monitoring. A key pillar of its success is the *homestay rotation system*, ensuring equitable income distribution, complemented by a transparent revenue-sharing mechanism in which 40% is allocated to infrastructure and social programs, 30% to environmental conservation (including waste management and bamboo forest preservation), 20% to cultural activities, and 10% to administrative costs. This integrated approach has resulted in tangible benefits: steady household income growth, reduced economic inequality, enhanced community cohesion, revitalized traditional ceremonies, preserved environmental

quality, and increased youth employment opportunities. Consequently, Penglipuran has emerged not only as an attractive tourist destination but also as a replicable model for heritage-based tourism management that safeguards local values while delivering equitable economic benefits (Suansri, 2003; Cole, 2007; Sutawa, 2012; Sunarta et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2022).

Bali presents a unique case in heritage tourism management, where traditional villages (Desa Adat) serve as central actors in preserving and managing local cultural heritage. These villages not only safeguard traditional and spiritual values but also actively regulate spatial planning, tourism activities, and collective economic benefit distribution through customary laws (awig-awig). This creates a distinctive "Sixtahelix" model that expands the conventional pentahelix framework by incorporating traditional villages as a sixth essential element in sustainable, locally grounded heritage tourism governance. Smart tourism approaches are gradually being integrated to strengthen heritage tourism development, though research indicates Indonesia lags other countries in their implementation (Kusumastuti et al., 2024). Studies in heritage villages like Kayutangan (Malang) demonstrate that combining historical value with architectural, artistic, and cultural elements can attract niche tourists, requiring planning that emphasizes authenticity and visitor satisfaction strategies (Antariksa et al., 2024; Murtikasari & Tukiman, 2021).

Visitors' experiences at Indonesia's heritage sites generally score highly, reflecting moments that blend cultural immersion with comfort. As shown in Table 23, all five service quality indicators averaged ≥3.79, indicating that most respondents agreed facilities and services are in good condition. visitors to Indonesian heritage sites generally have a positive experience, with high mean scores across most categories. The highest-rated aspect of their visit is the "Cleanliness and maintenance of sites," which scored an impressive 4.34. This suggests that sites are well-kept and a priority for management. Visitors also appreciate the modern and engaging elements, as indicated by the high score of 4.16 for the "Availability of interactive and immersive experiences." The accessibility of heritage sites, including transportation and signage, is also rated highly at 4.11.

However, two areas received slightly lower, though still positive, scores. The "Safety and security at heritage sites" received a mean score of 3.87, while the "Quality of guided tours and interpretation services" received the lowest score at 3.80. While these scores are still above the midpoint, they suggest that there is room for improvement in these areas. Enhancing safety measures and improving the quality of guides and informational services could further elevate the overall visitor experience and satisfaction in Indonesia's heritage tourism sector. These elements mirror the service expectations for heritage tourism globally; as Pandey & Sahu (2020) highlight in the Indian context, effective crowd management, consistent cleanliness, and proactive site upkeep are essential to enhancing visitor satisfaction, a view echoed by Domínguez-Quintero et al. (2019), who found that creating an authentic environment with interactive experiences can enhance tourists' memorable experiences and satisfaction (Pandey & Sahu, 2020).

Table 23. Visitors experience quality at heritage destinations in Indonesia

Visitors' experience ratings in Indonesia	**M**
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.	4,34
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).	4,16
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).	4,11
Safety and security at heritage sites.	3,87
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.	3,80

The survey findings suggest that overall, the service quality at heritage destinations meets basic expectations, especially in terms of fundamental infrastructure (access, cleanliness, safety). This is commendable because fundamental service standards are the entry point of any destination. The positive evaluation likely stems from flagship heritage destinations (e.g., Borobudur temple area, Prambanan, and national museums) that are managed relatively professionally. Nevertheless, the challenge going forward is to enhance the depth of visitor experience (beyond basic services). The lowest score on "interactive experiences" highlights opportunities for innovation in interpretation and content presentation. Globally, many heritage sites have adopted AR/VR technology to bring history to life (for example: AR smart glasses at Pompeii, or mobile apps in the Louvre). Indonesia can follow suit: develop AR guide apps, create immersive exhibit rooms, or hold historical re-enactment events at sites. Such innovation would greatly improve visitor engagement, especially among tech-savvy younger generations. The qualitative analysis revealed that most participants also highlighted the importance of new technology in terms of improving visitor engagement. For example, P13: "The use of augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) technologies to present reconstructions of the site's historical past, as well as interactive exhibitions in on-site museums."

Behind the beauty of ancient temples, old towns, and historic fortresses, heritage tourism management in Indonesia still grapples with governance hurdles. On the ground, it is common to see programs moving in parallel rather than in harmony, tourism offices launching promotional campaigns, state-owned site managers focusing on restoration, while local governments and communities pursue different priorities. As a result, opportunities for collaboration often slip away. This mirrors the observations of Kusumah (2024), who noted that layered bureaucracy and overlapping roles among local authorities remain major obstacles to destination development.

Table 24. Major governance and policy challenges in heritage tourism in Indonesia

What governance challenges most impact heritage tourism?	**M**
Lack of inter-agency coordination.	4,54
Weak enforcement of regulations.	4,43
Political instability.	4,39
Insufficient community engagement.	4,28

The most significant governance challenges for heritage tourism are highly rated across the board. The top challenge, with a mean score of 4.54, is the "Lack of inter-agency coordination." This indicates that different government bodies and organizations involved in heritage tourism are not working together effectively, leading to fragmented efforts and inefficient management. The second most impactful challenge is the "Weak enforcement of regulations," with a high mean score of 4.43. This suggests that even when policies and rules are in place to protect heritage sites and ensure sustainable practices, they are often not properly implemented or monitored. Other major challenges include "Political instability," which scored 4.39, and "Insufficient community engagement" at 4.28. These scores highlight the significant negative impact that a volatile political environment can have on long-term tourism planning and the need for greater involvement of local communities in the decision-making process.

Regulatory enforcement is another challenge. Laws such as the Cultural Heritage Act, zoning provisions, and spatial planning regulations are in place, yet in certain areas, violations from unpermitted construction to land use that undermines historical value still occur without firm sanctions. As one tourism academic put it, "We have good regulations, but enforcement on the ground is weak." Local community involvement also remains limited. In some heritage villages, only a handful of residents' work as guides, homestay owners, or attraction managers. Yet when

locals become part of the story, they are not merely beneficiaries of tourism revenue; they are active custodians of the heritage itself. Political factors rank lowest among the concerns, yet they still carry weight. Leadership changes or shifting policy directions can abruptly stall management plans that have been years in the making.

This overall picture suggests that preserving heritage is not simply about maintaining old buildings or safeguarding archaeological treasures. It is about uniting efforts, ensuring that all stakeholders, from government agencies to local communities, sit at the same table, enforcing rules consistently, and fostering a sense of ownership that makes everyone a guardian of the past. The qualitative analysis also supports this notion and many participants noted that effective governance is the key indicator for sustainable development. In this regard, **P13**:

> *"[...] to preserve and enhance the quality of heritage resources, several key policies and frameworks are necessary. First, it is crucial to designate important heritage sites with national or international cultural heritage status. This official recognition serves as a legal foundation for their protection and helps prioritize them in development and conservation agendas."*

Table 25. Mean scores of economic barriers in heritage tourism in Indonesia

What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?	M
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.	4,44
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.	4,33
Limited access to investment and funding.	4,30
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.	4,11

Alongside benefits, respondents are also aware of economic barriers and downsides of heritage tourism (Table 25). The most critical challenge is "leakage of tourism revenue to foreign companies," which scored 4.44. This indicates worry that a portion of tourism profits does not stay local but flows to outside operators or foreign investors. A Bali case study reported leakage rates up to ~51% in chain-affiliated hotels. Those data align with our respondents' perceptions. The next barrier is unequal distribution of tourism benefits (the highest score, 4.33). While tourism grows the economy, often only a few parties (e.g., big investors, certain businesses) reap the majority of gains, while smaller locals benefit less. **P15** from qualitative analysis acknowledged in his interview: *"Much of the tourism profit goes to capital owners. Locals end up in lower-level jobs with modest pay."*

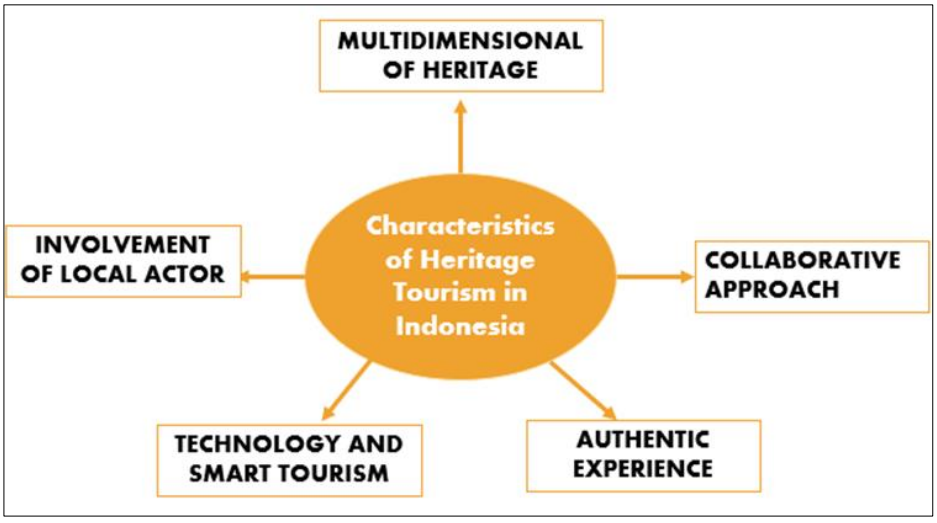
This highlights that equitable distribution remains a major task. Further, seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand are also considered a problem (4.11). Many heritage destinations experience low seasons outside holidays, so incomes are not stable year-round, which makes it hard for small businesses to maintain cash flow and workforce. Finally, limited access to investment and funding for locals scored 4.30 – affirming that local SMEs often struggle to expand tourism businesses due to a lack of capital. One of the participants (i.e., **P10**) from qualitative data analysis also indicated the importance of respecting carrying capacity and ensuring local community's benefits as follow: *"We must respect the carrying capacity and ensure local communities benefit economically, to avoid conflict and fatigue."*

Overall, the above findings portray the economic paradox of tourism: on one hand, it provides benefits and opportunities, but on the other, it can deepen inequalities if unmitigated. High leakage and inequality threaten long-term sustainability because they can spark social resistance. Brooks et al. (2023) also stressed the negative effects of heritage tourism, such as restricted land access for locals, livelihood loss, and increased living costs that often burden local communities.

Therefore, mitigation efforts are needed – for example, adopting policies to increase local multiplier effects (requiring hotels to source locally, etc.), promoting local ownership/investment, and instituting benefit-sharing programs. Some solutions include revolving microcredit for community enterprises, cooperative partnerships between local communities and site managers, and regulations to limit excessive foreign ownership in heritage zones, all aimed at reducing leakage. Without such measures, there's a risk that heritage tourism may reinforce a form of economic "soft colonialism" where large international corporations control the land, infrastructure, and reap profits.

Conceptually, the main characteristics of heritage tourism in Indonesia can be seen in the following overview.

Figure 20. Key Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Indonesia



Source: (Research, 2025)

This matter is elaborated in detail in the following discussion:

✓ **Multidimensionality of Heritage**

This concept refers to the complexity and diversity of cultural elements that constitute a nation's identity. In the context of Indonesia, this multidimensionality is evident in a variety of tangible cultural heritage forms, such as Hindu-Buddhist temples (e.g., Borobudur and Prambanan), colonial architecture in historical cities like Jakarta and Semarang, and traditional villages like Tenganan and Wae Rebo. These heritage assets are not merely aesthetic and historical symbols; they also reflect the social, political, and spiritual values that once thrived within their respective communities. Due to their visual and monumental nature, these tangible forms of heritage are often used as the primary attractions in the development of cultural tourism.

However, heritage is not limited to physical manifestations alone. Intangible heritage plays an equally vital role in shaping local cultural identity. This includes practices, knowledge, expressions, and skills passed down through generations, such as traditional ceremonies, dances, musical arts, folklore, and handcrafted works like batik, weaving, and wood carving. Religious rituals such as *Nyepi* in Bali, *Tabuik* in Pariaman, and *Sekaten* in Yogyakarta are examples of intangible heritage that not only strengthen social cohesion but also hold significant spiritual and educational value. These intangible elements breathe life into physical artifacts and offer a more holistic cultural experience for visitors.

Acknowledging the multidimensional nature of heritage is crucial for planning and managing sustainable cultural tourism. An integrative approach that combines physical conservation with the revitalization of cultural practices enhances the authenticity of tourism destinations and extends the lifecycle of tourism products. Moreover, such an approach creates opportunities for local communities to actively participate in the interpretation of their own cultural heritage. In this way, tourism becomes not merely an economic instrument but a medium for safeguarding, celebrating, and transmitting cultural heritage across generations. Heritage-based tourism strategies must be capable of responding to this complexity in a holistic manner to prevent cultural commodification that diminishes the intrinsic meanings and values of heritage itself.

✓ **Involvement of Local Actors**

This is a fundamental aspect in achieving the sustainability of heritage tourism destinations. In the Indonesian context, local community participation does not merely serve as a complementary component of destination management but as a central element in maintaining authenticity, ensuring the continuity of cultural values, and creating meaningful visitor experiences. Research shows that involving communities in the processes of planning, decision-making, and management of tourism activities strengthens their sense of ownership over cultural resources (Suranto, 2020). When communities are empowered socially and economically through tourism, they are more motivated to protect and preserve their local cultural assets.

Participatory governance models in heritage tourism generally emphasize collaboration among government institutions, businesses, academics, and local communities. In practice, this approach can be observed in the management of tourism villages such as Nglanggeran (Yogyakarta), Penglipuran (Bali), and Kampung Lawas Maspati (Surabaya), where local residents play a primary role in providing tourism services, managing infrastructure, and preserving cultural heritage. A study by Ezeh et al. (2024) highlights that the success of such models depends on the capacity of local institutions, trust among stakeholders, and the existence of fair mechanisms for benefit distribution.

The involvement of local actors also creates a dialogical space between traditional values and tourism market demands, allowing culture to be not merely preserved as a relic of the past but dynamically revived in accordance with contemporary contexts. In this way, participatory governance influences not only cultural preservation but also supports inclusive economic development, strengthens local identity, and enhances social resilience. In the long term, strengthening the role of local actors becomes essential for maintaining a balance between the use of cultural resources for tourism and the preservation of the heritage values upon which they are built.

✓ **Collaborative Approach**

In the management of heritage tourism in Indonesia, the collaborative approach has increasingly been recognized for its effectiveness in addressing the complex interplay between cultural preservation and local economic development. Collaboration among various stakeholders, including national and local governments, local communities, private sector actors (such as tourism entrepreneurs), as well as cultural and academic institutions, is essential for establishing an inclusive, responsive, and sustainable governance framework. Research by Basyar et al. (2025) on the management of the Majapahit heritage houses in Trowulan demonstrates that the success of preservation programs is closely tied to structured multi-actor coordination, clear role distribution, and ongoing dialogue between differing interests. In this

context, collaboration is not only about allocating tasks, but also about creating a mediation space between conservation goals and the economic needs of the surrounding community.

A similar view is supported by de Montigny et al. (2019), who argue that cross-sector collaboration is a fundamental requirement in developing adaptive models of cultural tourism management, especially in response to challenges such as social change, urbanization, land-use conversion, and excessive commercialization. For instance, the revitalization of the Kota Lama (Old Town) area in Semarang was achieved through a partnership between the city government, heritage communities, property investors, and MSME stakeholders. This partnership successfully transformed previously neglected heritage spaces into hubs of creative economic activity while preserving the historical and architectural identity of the area.

Figure 21. Kota Lama (Old Town) Semarang Before & After

Source: (GPT Photo)

The transformation of the Kota Lama (Old Town) area in Semarang stands as a model for heritage-led urban regeneration in Indonesia. Once a neglected historic quarter characterized by decaying colonial buildings, poor public amenities, and minimal economic activity, the district faced both structural deterioration and socio-economic decline. Through a multi-stakeholder partnership involving the Semarang City Government, heritage preservation communities, property investors, and MSME (micro, small, and medium enterprise) stakeholders, the area underwent a comprehensive revitalization. The approach combined heritage conservation, ensuring the restoration of façades, streetscapes, and architectural details in line with conservation principles, with economic activation. Historic spaces were repurposed into cafés, art galleries, boutique shops, and co-working hubs, fostering a creative economy while safeguarding architectural authenticity. Public realm upgrades, including pedestrian-friendly streets, improved lighting, and cultural signage, encouraged both local and tourist engagement.

A *before-and-after visual sequence,* showing crumbling structures and empty streets transformed into vibrant, bustling cultural corridors, can vividly illustrate the success of this initiative. Such imagery underscores how strategic partnerships can turn heritage assets into living, economically viable urban spaces without sacrificing historical integrity.

The collaborative approach also provides room for local communities to act not only as objects of tourism development but as active subjects in the planning and decision-making processes. Through mechanisms such as multi-stakeholder forums, joint training programs, and the management of tourism cooperatives, these synergies foster culturally based innovations that align with local characteristics. Thus, a collaborative approach is not merely a technocratic strategy but also an ethical one that respects the diversity of stakeholders, enhances the legitimacy of heritage management, and ensures the long-term sustainability of cultural tourism destinations in Indonesia.

✓ **Technology and Smart Tourism**

Technology plays an increasingly vital role in the development of heritage tourism in Indonesia, particularly in improving accessibility, enhancing visitor experience, and preserving cultural heritage. The adoption of digital tools such as 3D documentation, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) has enabled interactive and educational representations of historical sites, effectively expanding tourist reach to areas that were previously difficult to access. For example, 3D documentation facilitates the digital preservation of heritage structures such as Borobudur and Prambanan Temples, thereby supporting conservation efforts while also providing accurate data for educational and promotional purposes (Prasidya et al., 2025). Likewise, one of the participants (i.e., **P13**) from the qualitative analysis mentioned in the interview that mapping the heritage sites with advanced technology could be beneficial for the efficiency of site management as follows: *[...] using mapping technologies like GIS, along with visual and descriptive recording that is useful for further management and research. If the site meets the required criteria, it is then given legal status as a cultural heritage site, national heritage, or world heritage, complete with zoning regulations that define core, buffer, and development zones."*

In addition, destination promotion through digital platforms such as social media, interactive websites, and location-based travel applications has become a common practice that strengthens visitor engagement, particularly among millennials and Gen Z travelers. A study by Pujiastuti et al. (2022) reveals that tourists' perceived value of heritage destinations increases significantly when they are exposed to visual content and cultural narratives through digital channels before their visit. In areas like Yogyakarta and Bali, the use of QR codes at heritage sites has been implemented to provide historical information in multiple languages, enhancing real-time learning experiences for visitors.

Nevertheless, the adoption of smart tourism concepts in Indonesia still faces major challenges, especially regarding uneven digital infrastructure, limited local technological capacity, and low digital literacy among heritage site managers. As a result, most digital innovations remain concentrated in popular destinations, while heritage sites in underdeveloped regions are unable to enjoy the same benefits. Therefore, the advancement of smart heritage tourism must be accompanied by inclusive policies, community-based technology training, and equitable investment in digital infrastructure, so that technology serves as an instrument of empowerment rather than exclusion. In this regard, the application of technology in heritage tourism is not merely about modernization, but about strengthening the connection between the past and present in a sustainable, participatory, and data-driven manner.

✓ **Focus on Authentic Experience**

This has become one of the key pillars in the sustainable development of heritage tourism in Indonesia. This approach emphasizes the importance of facilitating direct interaction between tourists and local cultures, rather than merely offering static artifacts or overly commercialized attractions. In this context, authenticity is not only understood as the preservation of the

physical forms of cultural heritage, but also as a deep emotional and intellectual experience that connects tourists with the historical, social, and spiritual meanings of a destination.

Research by Tian et al. (2020) shows that perceptions of cultural authenticity strongly influence tourist satisfaction and significantly increase their intention to revisit. Elements such as direct participation in traditional activities (e.g., batik making, dancing, cooking local cuisine), interaction with residents, and the delivery of strong, personalized historical narratives are key factors in creating a memorable tourism experience. Their study in several heritage destinations in Bali and Yogyakarta found that tourists tend to value experiences that reveal genuine cultural values and are not excessively adjusted for mass tourism consumption. As a result of the qualitative analysis, many participants noted that the quality of the heritage experience is shaped by storytelling that emphasizes the originality and authenticity of the heritage site's narratives. In this regard, for example, **P12**:

> *"Authentic and original cultural heritage products, with complete and engaging information and storytelling delivered to visitors, resulting in a memorable experience. This experience fosters a sense of love for the destination, encouraging tourists to help preserve its cultural heritage."*

Management strategies that prioritize authentic experiences also positively impact the preservation of cultural traditions themselves. When local communities are empowered as cultural narrators, rather than merely tourism service providers, cultural practices that were once in decline can be revitalized and passed on to future generations. Furthermore, this approach fosters emotional connections between visitors and local communities, strengthens cross-cultural empathy, and contributes to the development of a distinct and competitive destination image in the global market. However, it is essential to maintain a balance between cultural authenticity and tourism demands to avoid excessive commodification of culture. Therefore, the development of authenticity-based tourism must be carried out through sensitive curation, ethical frameworks, and active participation of the community in all decision-making processes.

4.4.3. Heritage Tourism Assets in Indonesia

Heritage tourism assets in Indonesia can be classified into two main categories: tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Tangible heritage includes physical sites such as temples, palaces, archaeological sites, colonial buildings, and traditional settlements ranging from Borobudur and Prambanan Temples to the Old Town of Jakarta and customary villages in Bali. On the other hand, intangible heritage encompasses traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, as well as knowledge and skills passed down through generations. UNESCO (2003) emphasizes that intangible cultural heritage holds equal significance to tangible heritage, as it reflects the identity, values, and cultural continuity of a community. Indonesia has actively sought international recognition for its rich heritage, with elements such as batik, angklung, and pencak silat having been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Thus, understanding and managing both forms of heritage assets is essential to developing an authentic, inclusive, and sustainable cultural tourism sector. The qualitative analysis revealed that almost half of the participants emphasized the need to inventory Indonesian heritage assets for effective management. For instance, **P13** stated: *"The first step is initial inventory, conducted by authorized institutions such as the Directorate General of Culture, to record cultural heritage assets—both tangible and intangible. This inventory process involves field surveys, interviews with indigenous communities or site owners, and archival data collection."* The following Table 26 elaborates on these categories.

Table 26. Tangible Asset & Intangible Asset in Indonesia

Tangible Asset			
No.	**Site**	**Location**	**Year**
1	Borobudur Temple Compounds	Magelang, Jawa Tengah	1991
2	Prambanan Temple Compounds	Klaten–Sleman, Jawa Tengah/Yogyakarta	1991
3	Sangiran Early Man Site	Sragen–Karanganyar, Jawa Tengah	1996
4	Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the Subak System as a Manifestation of Tri Hita Karana	Bali	2012
5	Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage of Sawahlunto	Sawahlunto, Sumatra Barat	2019
6	The Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta and its Historic Landmarks	Yogyakarta	2023
7	Taman Nasional Komodo (Komodo National Park)	Nusa Tenggara Timur	1991
8	Taman Nasional Ujung Kulon (Ujung Kulon National Park)	Banten	1991
9	Taman Nasional Lorentz (Lorentz National Park)	Papua	1999
10	Warisan Hutan Hujan Tropis Sumatra (Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra)	Sumatra (Taman Nasional Gunung Leuser, Kerinci Seblat, dan Bukit Barisan Selatan)	2004 *(In Danger List sejak 2011)*

Source: Research Data Collection, 2025

Intangible Asset			
No	**Heritage Item**	**Location**	**Year**
1	Rencong	Aceh	2013
2	Tari Tor-tor	Sumatera Utara	2013
3	Gordang Sambilan	Sumatera Utara	2014
4	Rumah Adat Karo	Sumatera Utara	2013
5	Rendang	Sumatera Barat	2013
6	Rumah Gadang	Sumatera Barat	2013
7	Sistem Matrilineal Minangkabau	Sumatera Barat	2013
8	Dulmuluk	Sumatera Selatan	2013
9	Songket Palembang	Sumatera Selatan	2013
10	Aksara Kaganga	Bengkulu, Sumatera Barat, dll.	2014
11	Tabot & Tabuik	Bengkulu dan Sumatera Barat	2014
12	Krinok	Jambi	2013
13	Tenun Siak	Riau	2013
14	Makyong	Kepulauan Riau	2013
15	Gurindam Dua Belas	Kepulauan Riau	2013
16	Gazal	Kepulauan Riau	2013

17	Dambus	Bangka Belitung	2015
18	Muang Jong	Bangka Belitung	2015
19	Tapis	Lampung	2013
20	Debus	Banten	2015
21	Ondel-ondel	DKI Jakarta	2013
22	Topeng Betawi & Lenong	DKI Jakarta	2013
23	Pantun Betawi	DKI Jakarta	2016
24	Kujang	Jawa Barat	2013
25	Ronggeng Gunung	Jawa Barat	2013
26	Sisingaan	Jawa Barat	2013
27	Calung Banyumas	Jawa Tengah & Jawa Barat	2013
28	Reog Ponorogo	Jawa Timur	2013
29	Karapan Sapi	Jawa Timur	2013
30	Sapi Sonok	Jawa Timur	2013
31	Gandrung Banyuwangi	Jawa Timur	2013
32	Kentrung	Jawa Timur	2013
33	Gerabah Kasongan	DI Yogyakarta	2013
34	Makepung	Bali	2013
35	Bidai (Bide')	Kalimantan Barat	2013
36	Songket Sambas	Kalimantan Barat	2013
37	Rumah Panjang Dayak	Kalimantan	2013
38	Karungut	Kalimantan Tengah & Kalimantan Selatan	2013
39	Sasirangan	Kalimantan Selatan	2013
40	Ulap Doyo	Kalimantan Timur	2013
41	Belian Bawo	Kalimantan Timur	2013
42	Hudoq	Kalimantan Timur	2013
43	Tari Maengket	Sulawesi Utara	2013
44	Mane'e	Sulawesi Utara	2013
45	Kolintang	Sulawesi Utara	2013
46	Saiyyang Pattu'du	Sulawesi Barat	2013
47	Tari Raigo	Sulawesi Tengah	2013
48	Kalosara	Sulawesi Tenggara	2013
49	Kabanti	Sulawesi Tenggara	2013
50	Lariangi	Sulawesi Tenggara	2013
51	Kagati	Sulawesi Tenggara	2013
52	Pinisi	Sulawesi Selatan	2017
53	Pa'gellu	Sulawesi Selatan	2013
54	Sinriliq	Sulawesi Selatan	2013

55	Pakkarena	Sulawesi Selatan	2013
56	Molapi Saronde	Gorontalo	2013
57	Gendang Beleq	Nusa Tenggara Barat	2013
58	Wayang Kulit Sasak	Nusa Tenggara Barat	2013
59	Sasando	Nusa Tenggara Timur	2013
60	Caci	Nusa Tenggara Timur	2013
61	Rumah Bale Sumba	Nusa Tenggara Timur	2013
62	Ehe Lawn	Maluku	2013
63	Tais Pet	Maluku	2013
64	Maku-maku	Maluku	2013
65	Bambu Gila	Maluku Utara	2013
66	Soya-soya	Maluku Utara	2013
67	Yosim Pancar (Yospan)	Papua	2013
68	Ukiran Asmat	Papua	2013
69	Barappen	Papua & Papua Barat	2013
70	Tifa	Papua, Maluku, NTB	2013
71	Wayang	Jawa	2003
72	Keris	Jawa Tengah	2005
73	Batik	Jawa Tengah	2009
74	Angklung	Jawa Barat	2010
75	Tari Saman	Aceh	2011
76	Noken	Papua	2012
77	Tenun Ikat Sumba	Nusa Tenggara Timur	2013

Source: (Research Data Collection, 2025)

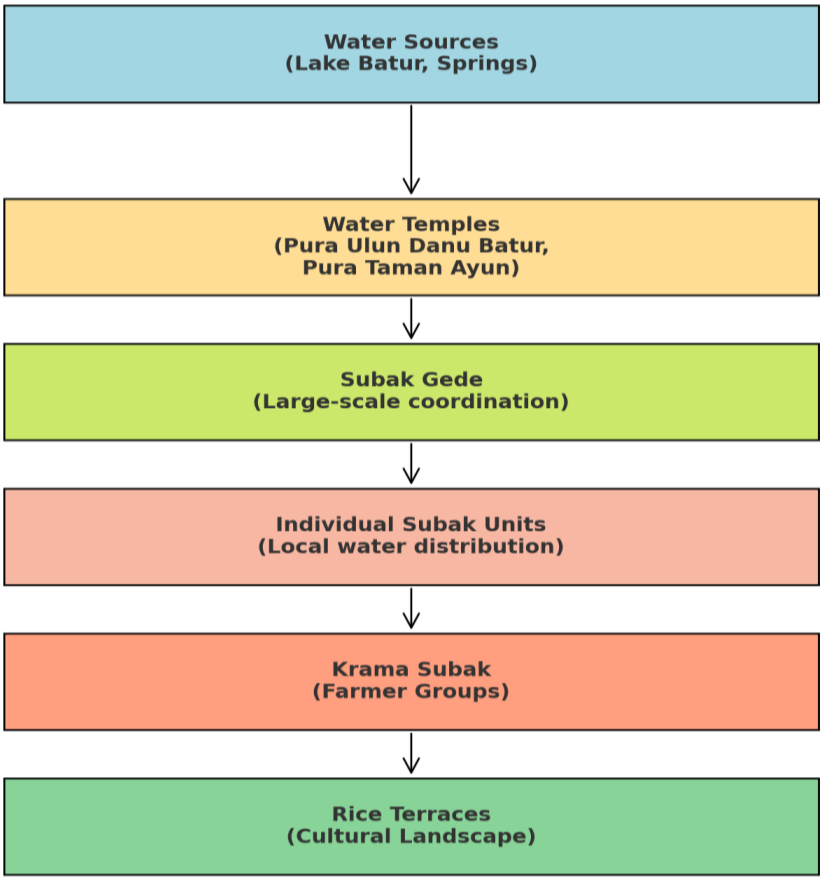
4.4.4. Challenges for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Indonesia

Heritage tourism has become an increasingly important pillar of Indonesia's tourism strategy, especially as the country leverages its vast cultural and natural assets to position itself in the global market. From ancient temple complexes to living traditions, Indonesia's heritage offers unique experiences that blend the tangible and intangible. However, the development of heritage tourism is not without risks; it must carefully balance conservation, community participation, and economic growth. This intricate balance is the cornerstone of sustainable heritage tourism, where tourism activities do not compromise the integrity of cultural and natural heritage but instead support their preservation and enhancement.

In the Indonesian context, sustainable heritage tourism is particularly complex due to the nation's geographic diversity, multi-ethnic society, and decentralized governance. Many heritage sites are embedded within living cultural landscapes and active communities, such as the Subak system in Bali or the traditional villages in East Nusa Tenggara. These communities are not just passive custodians of heritage but are actively involved in shaping its meaning and continuity. Therefore, any tourism development that neglects their agency risks undermining both cultural resilience and social justice. Furthermore, the diversity of stakeholders involved from local governments and customary institutions (e.g., Desa Adat) to private sectors and NGOs, demands an inclusive governance model that is often difficult to implement in practice.

The Subak system of Bali, a UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape, is a holistic socio-ecological framework that harmoniously integrates irrigation, agriculture, spirituality, and community governance under the Balinese Hindu philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*. Anchored by sacred water temples such as Pura Ulun Danu Batur, it blends religious rituals with practical water management, supported by a democratic, cooperative structure where farmers collectively decide on irrigation, maintenance, and conflict resolution. Its sophisticated hydraulic engineering channels water from sacred sources through terraced landscapes, while a hierarchical organization, from *Subak Gede* to *krama subak*—ensures coordination across scales. Guided by lunar and *pawukon* calendars, the system synchronizes planting cycles with ecological balance, sustaining both tangible and intangible heritage, from rituals and music to communal festivals. Over centuries, Subak has demonstrated adaptive resilience to environmental and social changes, though its future depends on balancing traditional values with modern economic and developmental pressures.

Figure 22. Structural Layers of Subak Systen in Bali



Source: (Gaveau et al., 2025)

The visual diagram showing the structural layers of the Subak system, from sacred water sources at the top, through temples and governance units, down to the rice terraces, illustrating how spiritual, administrative, and agricultural elements are interconnected. This conversion not only reduces agricultural resilience but also endangers the Subak irrigation system, a centuries-old UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape that relies on harmonious water management and communal governance (Gaveau et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the diversity of stakeholders involved, from local governments and customary institutions such as *Desa Adat* (traditional Balinese village councils responsible for safeguarding cultural values, customary law, and ritual obligations) to private sectors and NGOs—demands an inclusive governance model that is often difficult to implement in practice. In the context of heritage tourism governance, *Desa Adat* hold significant authority over land use, ritual scheduling, and the maintenance of sacred sites, often guided by *awig-awig* (customary law). While their role is crucial for ensuring cultural authenticity and community engagement, it can also present coordination challenges with formal government agencies, particularly in aligning conservation strategies, enforcing regulations, and integrating sustainable tourism policies. As highlighted in the governance dimensions of the interview and survey framework, weak inter-agency coordination, insufficient stakeholder integration, and unequal distribution of tourism benefits are persistent barriers. The unique legal and cultural standing of *Desa Adat* means that heritage tourism projects in Bali must navigate overlapping jurisdictions, reconcile customary and state law, and ensure that economic gains are equitably reinvested into community development without compromising intangible heritage values.

Heritage tourism in Indonesia carries a quiet tension beneath its vibrant scenes, temple courtyards alive with incense and old town streets bustling with vendors mask deeper challenges.

Table 27. What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?

Biggest barriers	**M**
Climate change and environmental degradation.	4,59
Over-tourism and overcrowding.	4,56
Weak enforcement of regulations.	4,54
Lack of awareness among tourists.	4,38
Lack of funding for conservation.	4,34

From the survey, weak regulation enforcement (4.54) and lack of funding (4.34) are the top challenges, followed by low tourist awareness (4.38) and environmental/climate threats (4.59). Tourist overcrowding (4.56) is rated slightly lower but remains significant. It can be illustrated that Rules to protect these treasures exist, yet enforcement is often patchy, allowing violations to slip by. Conservation work waits in line behind limited budgets, while visitor etiquette is not always observed, leaving traces of neglect. Crowds surge during peak seasons, and climate pressures slowly erode what time has already worn. Sustaining these heritage sites will depend on firm enforcement, reliable funding, and fostering a culture of respect among all who walk their grounds.

Beneath the surface of Indonesia's rich heritage, from ancient temples bathed in morning light to bustling historic quarters alive with street vendors, there are persistent challenges quietly eroding sustainability efforts. Site managers often voice a similar frustration: *the rules are there, but their bite is weak*. As **P10** from qualitative analysis, who oversees one heritage site, explained on an interview, *"Regulations are adequate, but enforcement is lax; many violations, like illegal structures in heritage zones, go unchecked."*

Money is another sticking point. With limited government budgets and sporadic private investment, much-needed conservation projects are pushed back, leaving weather-worn stonework or fragile wooden facades exposed to further decay. There is also the matter of awareness. While international visitors often arrive armed with a sense of heritage etiquette, many domestic tourists are still unfamiliar with its unspoken code, a code that says you don't leave litter on sacred grounds or cross ropes meant to protect fragile structures. These small

breaches, repeated thousands of times, can leave a lasting mark. Overcrowding is another shadow cast across the visitor's experience. At peak seasons, narrow temple corridors and museum halls fill to the brim, making it difficult to preserve both the artifacts and the sense of reverence they deserve. Added to this is the looming threat of climate change: heavier rains, rising temperatures, and environmental degradation put extra strain on sites that are already fragile. According to the qualitative data analysis, participants mostly emphasized that the offered experience is not staged but rather genuine; however, there is a concern that tourists' flow may potentially harm the cultural structure of the site. **P14** mentioned:

> *"The tourism products offered are not artificial, reflecting local cultural values that are still alive and passed down through generations. For example, the traditional Bali Aga houses in Pedawa Village are preserved not only physically but also in their social function and traditional rituals."*

Another weakness to tackle is visitor education and awareness. Although our respondents (mostly experts) perceive tourists as generally lacking in conservation awareness (challenge score 4.21), this is an alarm that interpretive and educational programs on-site aren't yet effective in shaping visitor behavior. Well-informed tourists tend to support conservation (e.g., not vandalizing, buying official tickets, respecting local norms). Thus, destination managers are recommended to improve interpretation quality – with guides who inspire, informative signboards that attract attention, and digital campaigns inviting tourists to participate in preservation. The local community's role is also central: if surrounding residents are proud and involved in preserving their culture, they can act as informal guides or monitors for tourists. This is exemplified in some heritage villages (like Penglipuran in Bali), where strong local wisdom automatically guides tourist behavior to be respectful. In short, heritage tourism sustainability will be ensured if the supporting ecosystem is strengthened: adequate funding, consistent rule enforcement, educated tourists and communities, and alignment of goals across institutions.

Taken together, these realities make clear that heritage tourism's future depends on more than charm and history. It calls for stronger enforcement, stable funding, and visitor education that inspires respect. Without these, the beauty that draws people in risks being worn down, one unguarded moment at a time.

Despite policy efforts and international recognition such as UNESCO World Heritage and Intangible Cultural Heritage inscriptions Indonesia continues to face multiple systemic and site-specific challenges in making heritage tourism genuinely sustainable. These challenges are rooted in environmental vulnerability, institutional fragmentation, cultural commodification, and uneven socio-economic development. Moreover, as the country accelerates toward digital transformation and global tourism competitiveness, issues of access, equity, and resilience become increasingly salient. The following section outlines these key challenges in greater detail, supported by recent studies and empirical cases across Indonesia.

Heritage tourism in Indonesia confronts a complex interplay of environmental, cultural, socio-economic, and governance challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term sustainability such as:

- ✓ **Environmental degradation**

Environmental degradation remains one of the most pressing threats to sustainable heritage tourism in Indonesia. The rise of overtourism characterized by an excessive concentration of tourists in a single area over time has accelerated ecological stress in many heritage destinations. In Bali, for example, the dramatic transformation of land use is evident through the

widespread conversion of rice fields into villas, hotels, and tourism infrastructure. This conversion not only reduces agricultural resilience but also endangers the Subak irrigation system, a centuries-old UNESCO-recognized cultural landscape that relies on harmonious water management and communal governance (Gaveau et al., 2025).

Beyond land conversion, other environmental pressures are equally alarming. Water over-extraction has been reported in tourism hotspots like Ubud and Seminyak, where luxury accommodations and tourist facilities consume significantly more water than local households (Monika et al., 2024). Simultaneously, coastal areas such as Labuan Bajo, one of Indonesia's "super-priority destinations," face unchecked development that results in coral reef degradation, solid waste buildup, and increased boat traffic that disrupts marine ecosystems (Pertiwi & Saputra, 2024). These activities not only threaten the ecological integrity of the Komodo National Park but also jeopardize the long-term attractiveness of the destination. Many participants from the qualitative analysis noted the importance of protecting the heritage environment as follows:

> *"It is essential to officially designate significant heritage sites as protected cultural heritage at the national or international level. Such recognition not only reinforces the importance of the site but also provides a legal basis for its preservation. Following this designation, the government should establish specific policies aimed at safeguarding the site, including the appointment of custodians or site guardians."* (**P15**)

Moreover, the cumulative environmental impact of tourism affects both tangible and intangible heritage. Pollution and overdevelopment can erode the spiritual and aesthetic values that define many traditional sites. For instance, sacred sites located in natural landscapes, such as water temples or ancestral forests, lose their authenticity when surrounded by commercial enterprises and vehicular congestion. This degradation is often exacerbated by weak enforcement of zoning laws, limited environmental planning, and a tourism model that prioritizes short-term gains over long-term sustainability. Addressing environmental degradation in heritage tourism, therefore, requires integrated land-use policies, ecotourism-based approaches, and strict environmental impact assessments (EIA). There is also a need to empower local communities, particularly those involved in traditional environmental stewardship systems like Subak, to have a stronger voice in decision-making processes. Without urgent mitigation, continued degradation will compromise not only environmental health but also the cultural values and experiential quality central to heritage tourism.

- ✓ **Cultural commodification and authenticity loss**

One of the most critical cultural challenges in heritage tourism development is the commodification of local traditions and the subsequent erosion of their authenticity. In the pursuit of economic benefits and tourist satisfaction, cultural expressions, particularly intangible heritage such as rituals, dances, crafts, and oral traditions, are often repackaged to meet commercial demands. This process reduces complex, sacred, or community-bound traditions into performative spectacles, stripped of their original meaning and context. A poignant example can be seen in Penglipuran Village, Bali, where the spatial reconfiguration of ritual areas into visitor zones and the proliferation of souvenir stalls along entrance corridors have altered both the physical and symbolic landscape of the community. Abdillah et al. (2022) argue that such modifications transform the village into a "human museum," where residents become performers and cultural practices are staged for visual consumption rather than lived experience. This trend not only affects the perceived value of heritage for visitors but also distorts the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge within the community itself.

Systematic reviews further affirm that the over-commercialization of heritage, particularly in high-traffic tourism sites, tends to prioritize aesthetic display over cultural meaning. For example, dances once reserved for sacred temple ceremonies are frequently shortened, stylized, or modified for daily tourist shows, diminishing their ritual significance (Zhang et al., 2021). The qualitative analysis also confirms that notion. Many participants highlighted the risk of commodifying heritage sites as follows:

> *"Socially, one of the major concerns is gentrification, which can displace local communities or alter their cultural identity. To mitigate this, local residents should be actively involved in the planning and management of tourism initiatives. Their participation not only helps preserve cultural authenticity but also ensures they benefit economically and socially from tourism activities."* (**P15**)

Similarly, traditional crafts may be mass-produced using synthetic materials, which undermines craftsmanship and disconnects the product from its cultural roots. The loss of authenticity is exacerbated by a top-down tourism development model that often marginalizes local stakeholders in the decision-making process. Without meaningful participation, communities have limited control over how their heritage is presented and interpreted. This lack of agency can lead to cultural alienation, as communities begin to view their own traditions as commodities rather than sources of identity and resilience. Mitigating these impacts requires a shift toward community-based heritage tourism, where local people are empowered as custodians and curators of their own culture. This approach emphasizes co-creation of experiences, cultural integrity, and inclusive benefit-sharing. Integrating cultural impact assessments (CIA) and participatory heritage planning can help ensure that tourism supports, rather than supplants, the living and evolving nature of cultural traditions.

- ✓ **Insufficient infrastructure and capacity**

Infrastructure and capacity limitations present significant obstacles to the realization of sustainable heritage tourism, particularly in rural and peripheral regions of Indonesia. Unlike major destinations such as Yogyakarta or Ubud, many culturally rich areas remain underdeveloped in terms of basic transportation, digital infrastructure, visitor facilities, and human capital. These limitations severely restrict the accessibility, visibility, and competitiveness of local heritage sites in the national and international tourism markets. In this regard, **P13** from qualitative analysis stated: *"Accessibility is essential in terms of services and in providing an unforgettable experience, thereby ensuring sustainability."*

Case studies from Cimande and Sawangan villages, both recognized for their deep-rooted martial and agrarian heritage, illustrate these systemic constraints. Soeswoyo et al. (2025) found that poorly maintained roads and the lack of integrated public transport infrastructure significantly discouraged tourist flow and limited regional connectivity. Additionally, the absence of reliable internet access and digital platforms hampered online promotion, virtual engagement, and market reach, especially post-pandemic, when digital visibility has become critical for tourism recovery. Compounding this issue is the lack of local capacity in essential areas such as hospitality, cultural storytelling, heritage interpretation, and entrepreneurial management. In many cases, community members have deep cultural knowledge but lack the training to present it in formats suitable for diverse audiences. This results in a missed opportunity to create immersive, educational tourism experiences that also preserve cultural depth. Furthermore, the limited availability of interpretive signage, guided tours, multilingual materials, and curated visitor centers weakens the narrative power and learning potential of the site (Soeswoyo & Dewantara, 2022).

The consequence of these infrastructure and capacity gaps is twofold: not only do they reduce the economic benefits that communities can derive from tourism, but they also marginalize local voices in shaping the direction and content of tourism development. As a result, heritage tourism in these contexts risks becoming extractive rather than empowering, undermining the principles of participatory governance and inclusive growth. To address this challenge, a strategic investment in capacity-building programs, rural connectivity, and culturally sensitive infrastructure is essential. Public-private partnerships, vocational training in heritage-based tourism, and integration of digital literacy into community empowerment frameworks could help bridge the gap. Moreover, embedding tourism development within broader rural revitalization policies could enhance sustainability and equity across Indonesia's diverse cultural landscapes.

- ✓ **Institutional fragmentation and limited coordination**

One of the critical structural barriers to sustainable heritage tourism in Indonesia is the persistence of institutional fragmentation and the lack of effective intersectoral coordination. Governance frameworks related to tourism, cultural heritage, environment, and spatial planning often operate in silos both horizontally across ministries and vertically between central, provincial, and local government levels. This fragmentation results in disjointed planning, overlapping regulations, and implementation gaps, particularly in areas designated as national tourism strategic zones or UNESCO sites.

The case of Labuan Bajo and the Komodo National Park offer a stark illustration of these challenges. While promoted as a "super-priority" tourism destination by the central government, development planning has often overlooked the interests of indigenous communities, such as the Ata Modo people, who have inhabited the area for generations. Studies have reported that tourism revenues are largely captured by external investors or centralized agencies, while local communities remain marginalized in both benefit distribution and decision-making processes (Capocchi et al., 2019; Jackson, 2025; Tohidy Ardahaey, 2011). Furthermore, inconsistencies between conservation mandates and tourism development agendas, particularly in marine protection zones, have led to regulatory confusion and local resistance.

Institutional fragmentation is also evident in the management of cultural heritage. For instance, the responsibility for safeguarding intangible cultural expressions may fall under the Ministry of Education and Culture, while tourism promotion is handled by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. Without effective coordination mechanisms, these parallel efforts often lead to duplicated programs or, worse, policies that conflict in their objectives. For example, mass events funded under tourism budgets may inadvertently commodify or trivialize sacred rituals meant for limited audiences. **P18** from qualitative analysis also noted the lack of accurate data in site management plans as follows: *"Lack of accurate data and research for decision-making [...]"*

Additionally, the lack of integrated databases, performance indicators, and shared accountability across government institutions undermines evidence-based policymaking. As a result, development tends to be driven by short-term political or commercial agendas, rather than long-term sustainability goals. The exclusion of customary institutions such as Desa Adat in Bali or Lembaga Adat in Eastern Indonesia further limits the incorporation of local wisdom and cultural governance systems that could support sustainable heritage tourism from the ground up. To address these issues, Indonesia needs to strengthen multi-level governance frameworks that support participatory, inclusive, and integrated planning. This includes establishing cross-sectoral coordination bodies, enhancing local institutional capacity, and

legally recognizing the role of traditional institutions in tourism governance. Without such reforms, the risk remains high that heritage tourism will perpetuate inequality, weaken cultural sovereignty, and fail to deliver sustainable outcomes.

✓ V**ulnerability to shocks (pandemics, disasters, and climate change)**

Multiple external shocks, including global pandemics, natural disasters, and climate change, increasingly threaten the resilience of heritage tourism destinations in Indonesia. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how abruptly tourism activity can collapse, causing severe economic disruption. Micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which form the backbone of Indonesia's tourism and heritage economy, were particularly affected. For instance, the batik industry, largely dependent on cultural tourism for both market and storytelling value, suffered dramatic declines in production and income (Negara et al., 2025; Susminingsih et al., 2017). Traditional artisans, performers, and cultural event organizers across regions faced not only income loss but also disruptions to the transmission of cultural knowledge

Furthermore, many heritage sites in Indonesia are in geographically vulnerable areas such as coastal zones, small islands, and volcanic landscapes. These areas are increasingly exposed to climate-related hazards, including floods, tsunamis, extreme rainfall, and coral bleaching. Labuan Bajo, Komodo, Lombok, and North Sulawesi, for example, are at high risk of climate impacts that can damage both the natural and cultural components of heritage destinations (UNDP Indonesia, 2023). The deterioration of coral reefs not only reduces biodiversity but also weakens the ecological foundation of marine-based heritage tourism. In upland areas, landslides and flooding threaten access roads, temples, and traditional villages. According to the qualitative data analysis, many participants highlighted the potential risk that frequent or severe natural disasters pose to the effective planning and management of heritage sites, as illustrated below:

> *"As per qualitative data analysis, many participants mentioned the risk of high natural disasters as follows: "The most effective tool is the site management plan, which includes early planning before the site is opened to tourists. It covers access, security, visitor profiles, and disaster management."* (**P10**)

Despite these threats, integrated disaster and climate risk management is still lacking in most heritage tourism planning. Few local governments have mainstreamed resilience measures such as early warning systems, adaptive infrastructure, or post-disaster recovery frameworks into their tourism strategies (Hadi, 2020). This leaves heritage assets and communities vulnerable to sudden shocks, undermining both conservation efforts and economic stability.

✓ **Balancing digital innovation with inclusivity**

The rise of digital technology offers unprecedented opportunities for enhancing heritage tourism through tools such as 3D documentation, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), QR code interpretation, and smart-tourism platforms. These technologies can enrich the visitor experience, improve heritage education, and facilitate long-distance engagement, especially during global disruptions like pandemics. In Indonesia, several pilot programs have utilized digital archives and virtual storytelling to promote lesser-known heritage sites, especially during the COVID-19 recovery period (Novianti et al., 2022).

However, these innovations also present significant risks of digital exclusion. Many rural or remote heritage destinations still lack the necessary infrastructure, such as reliable internet, electricity, or server access, required to support these tools. In addition, digital literacy among local communities, particularly elders and traditional custodians, remains low. Without inclusive training, community involvement, or local control over content, digital tourism can

become extractive, shaping narratives about heritage without the participation of those who live it. The unequal distribution of technological capacity reinforces existing socio-economic divides between urban and rural heritage sites. It also risks commodifying heritage through standardized digital formats that flatten cultural nuance. To ensure equity, digital innovation in heritage tourism must be paired with inclusive governance, local training programs, and community ownership of digital heritage assets (UNESCO, 2021c).

4.4.5. Success Factors for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Indonesia

In the eyes of heritage tourism experts, true success is not just counted in ticket sales or swelling visitor numbers. It is seen in the quiet discipline of waste management, the steady hum of solar panels, and the respectful limit on daily entries, signs of sustainability that protect both the environment and culture. It is reflected in the unbroken walls of an ancient temple, the preserved authenticity of a historic street, and the pride of local communities who share in the benefits. International recognition, whether a UNESCO listing or a global award, adds to a destination's prestige, but only matters when balanced with preservation and inclusivity. In short, a thriving heritage site is one where economic vitality, environmental care, cultural integrity, and community well-being stand side by side.

Table 28. What key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to measure heritage tourism governance?

Key performance indicators (KPIs)	M
Community engagement and local benefits.	4,26
Sustainability practices and environmental impact.	4,15
Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards).	4,15
Visitor numbers and tourism revenue.	4,11
Conservation status of heritage sites.	3,82

As a supplement, the survey asked which indicators are considered to best measure heritage tourism success (Table 28). The key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure heritage tourism governance are all considered important, with high mean scores across the board. The highest-rated KPI is "Community engagement and local benefits," with a mean score of 4.26. This indicates that stakeholders believe the success of heritage tourism is most effectively measured by its positive impact on the local community. Two other indicators, "Sustainability practices and environmental impact" and "Global recognition" (such as UNESCO listings), are also highly valued, both scoring a mean of 4.15. This suggests that a successful heritage tourism strategy is seen as one that not only protects the environment but also gains international prestige. The lowest-rated KPI is the "Conservation status of heritage sites," with a mean score of 3.82. While still a significant score, it suggests that stakeholders may be placing less emphasis on the physical condition of the sites compared to other, more tangible benefits like revenue and global recognition. This could be a point of concern for the long-term preservation of heritage.

Indonesia's heritage tourism landscape is enriched by cultural diversity that spans centuries-old temples, colonial-era architecture, traditional villages, and intangible cultural practices. This variety not only offers wide-ranging experiences for visitors but also strengthens the country's positioning in the global tourism market. Community involvement is another strong asset, local participation in guiding, homestay management, and cultural performances fosters authenticity and a sense of shared ownership. The nation also holds storytelling potential, where authentic narratives and immersive experiences can transform a simple visit into a deep cultural journey. Additionally, local government support often facilitates infrastructure development and policy

backing, while the educational value of heritage tourism serves as a tool for soft power and cultural diplomacy, enhancing Indonesia's image abroad;

Table 29. SWOT-Heritage Tourism in Indonesia

Strength	Weakness
Cultural Heritage diversity	Low managerial capacity
Community involvement	Regulatory conflicts
Storytelling potential (authentic narratives & immersive experience)	Lack of digital branding
Local government support	Limited funding
Educational value (Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy)	
Opportunity	**Threat**
Trend toward meaningful travel	Overtourism
Culture-based MICE potential	Ownership conflicts
Digital technology support	Cultural politicization
CSR & global partnerships	Central-Region development gap
UNESCO/OIC collaboration	Climate Risk & Natural Disaster

Source: (Research, 2025)

Despite its strengths, several internal limitations hinder optimal development. Low managerial capacity can result in inefficient operations, poor maintenance, and missed opportunities for innovation. Regulatory conflict, such as overlapping jurisdiction between heritage conservation authorities and tourism offices — create friction in decision-making. A lack of digital branding means that many heritage sites remain underrepresented in global online platforms, limiting their visibility to younger, tech-savvy travelers. Limited funding further constrains preservation efforts, while inadequate resource allocation can lead to deterioration of heritage assets.

Global tourism trends show a shift toward meaningful travel, where visitors seek cultural depth and community connection, a demand that aligns well with Indonesia's heritage offerings. There is also culture-based MICE potential, blending business events with cultural immersion to attract higher-spending markets. Digital technology support opens opportunities for virtual tours, interactive interpretation, and broader marketing reach. Additionally, CSR and global partnerships can bring in funding, expertise, and promotional leverage, while collaborations with UNESCO and OIC enhance international recognition and open doors for capacity-building.

However, external pressures pose risks to sustainability. Overtourism can erode site integrity, diminish visitor experience, and strain local communities. Ownership conflicts, especially where heritage assets are contested between public, private, or community stakeholders, may delay or derail preservation efforts. Cultural politicization could lead to the selective promotion or neglect of certain heritage narratives, affecting inclusivity and authenticity. The central-region development gap means that heritage sites outside major urban centers may lag in infrastructure and investment. Lastly, climate risk and natural disasters, from flooding to earthquakes, threaten both tangible and intangible heritage assets.

The SWOT profile suggests that Indonesia's heritage tourism stands at a strategic advantage, supported by its diversity, community roots, and storytelling potential. However, to fully harness opportunities such as meaningful travel trends, digital innovation, and global partnerships, it is essential to address managerial gaps, strengthen regulatory alignment, and

secure sustainable funding. Simultaneously, proactive measures are needed to mitigate threats from overtourism, climate change, and socio-political factors, ensuring that heritage assets remain resilient for generations to come.

Moreover, interesting facts indicate that this sector has the potential to be developed through innovation and collaboration. For example, user-generated content (UGC) such as tourist reviews and social media has proven effective in shaping the image of heritage destinations, particularly among young tourists (Gen Z), as well as increasing revisit loyalty (Tunjungsari et al., 2025). Additionally, community-based tourism practices implemented in Penglipuran Village, Bali, which recorded up to 3,500 visits per day in 2023, show that collaboration among residents and a local homestay rotation system can be an inclusive and sustainable model for heritage tourism development (Pradnyantara & Lestari, 2021). Thus, although Indonesia has immense cultural heritage wealth, the limited data system has prevented this potential from being fully utilized. To support preservation goals, community empowerment, and sustainable promotion, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive monitoring and visitation reporting system, not only for popular sites but for all heritage sites spread across Indonesia. This step is crucial so that heritage tourism planning and management can be conducted scientifically, measurably, and responsibly.

4.4.6. Recommended Practices for Indonesia

Heritage tourism has the potential to be a model for sustainable development with the right policy support. The sustainability of heritage destinations in Indonesia is on a promising track, evidenced by some conservation practices and community involvement already in place and appreciated by respondents. However, to ensure long-term sustainability, classical challenges such as funding, cross-sector coordination, law enforcement, and visitor education need to be promptly addressed. The quality of visitor experience at heritage sites meets basic standards, and aggressive digital marketing strategies have proven effective in boosting visits. Nonetheless, further innovation is needed in delivering deeper, more authentic experiences so that Indonesian heritage destinations can be globally competitive while remaining sustainable. Economically, heritage tourism clearly provides real benefits to local communities, but it also harbors the risk of inequality if not managed with pro-distribution policies. In other words, heritage tourism will only be truly sustainable if the 3Ps (People, Planet, Profit) are all fulfilled: community well-being improves, cultural-natural heritage is protected, and the sector remains financially viable for all stakeholders.

The following strategic recommendations are proposed for stakeholders:

a. Integrated Governance Strengthening: Establish a forum or joint management body that includes cross-sector government agencies (tourism, culture, creative economy), the private sector, and local community representatives for each major heritage destination. The goal is to formulate unified management plans, avoid overlapping programs, and ensure community participation in decision-making.
b. Improve Regulation Enforcement: Strengthen monitoring and sanctions related to heritage preservation. For example, assign dedicated heritage tourism police or rangers to patrol regularly, and enforce strict penalties for violations (vandalism, illegal construction in heritage zones, etc.). Ensure transparency in enforcement (publicize violation cases) to create deterrence and public awareness.
c. Diversify and Innovate Funding: Reduce reliance on state budgets by promoting PPP schemes in heritage (e.g., having state-owned enterprises or private firms “adopt” a site). Provide tax incentives for companies funding conservation. Develop a national

Heritage Crowdfunding platform with accountable oversight. Additionally, allocate revolving funds or microcredit for local heritage tourism businesses (craftspeople, guides) via cooperatives or local banks.

Table 30. What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?

Primary sources of funding	M
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).	4,41
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).	4,38
Branded Product sales.	4,34
Entrance fees.	4,11
Crowdfunding and community contributions.	4,02
Tourism taxes.	3,93
Government grants and subsidies.	3,69

All seven sources are regarded as important for financing heritage tourism projects in Indonesia (Table 30). The highest-rated option, with a mean score of 4.41, is private sector investments through Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), indicating that respondents see collaboration between businesses and public institutions as the most effective way to mobilize resources. Close behind are international donors, such as UNESCO and the World Bank (M = 4.38), reflecting the value placed on external funding for conservation and development. Branded product sales (M = 4.34) and entrance fees (M = 4.11) also receive strong support, suggesting that generating revenue from visitors and related merchandise is viewed as a viable approach. Crowdfunding and community contributions rank next (M = 4.02), highlighting interest in grassroots participation and local ownership of heritage initiatives. By comparison, tourism taxes (M = 3.93) and government grants and subsidies (M = 3.69) score somewhat lower, though they remain significant elements of the funding mix. Overall, the data from Indonesia suggest a diversified strategy, with an emphasis on leveraging private investment and international aid, complemented by revenue-generating activities and community engagement.

Table 31. Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism?

Funding mechanisms	M
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.	4,08
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.	4,03
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.	3,97
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).	3,80

All four funding mechanisms are seen as crucial for strengthening sustainable heritage tourism in Indonesia. The highest-rated mechanism, with a mean score of 4.08, is "Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development." This suggests that stakeholders believe collaboration between the government and the private sector is the most effective way to secure funding for necessary infrastructure. The second most important mechanism is "Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives," which scored a mean of 4.03. This highlights the perceived importance of financial incentives to encourage the preservation of heritage sites. "Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits" also received a high rating (3.97), indicating support for rewarding businesses that commit to sustainable practices. The lowest, though still significant, score of 3.80 is for "Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans)." While this is still considered an important tool, it is viewed as less

critical than large-scale infrastructure projects and policy-level incentives. Overall, the data points to a multi-faceted approach to funding, with a strong emphasis on leveraging public-private collaboration and providing direct financial incentives for conservation efforts.

Furthermore, referring to respondents' support for certification incentives, the Tourism Ministry and Ministry of Finance could design a scheme whereby heritage villages achieving sustainable tourism certification receive a block grant for local development projects. This would motivate other destinations to follow suit in adopting sustainable practices to get similar incentives. Micro-financing for local SMEs through cooperatives or microfinance institutions is also important, so local economies grow in tandem with the destination. **P11** from qualitative analysis mentioned: *"Many batik artisans in our heritage village struggle with capital. If there were soft credit, our products could compete better as souvenirs."* This underlines that financial support needs to reach the grassroots level, not just major infrastructure.

Another innovative approach is crowdfunding for specific heritage projects. Although respondents gave it a low score, perhaps due to unfamiliarity, crowdfunding can succeed if packaged attractively and transparently. For instance, a public fundraising campaign for restoring a specific historic building, packaged with an emotional story and transparent reporting, could attract millennial donors. Some overseas museums have successfully raised millions via such means. In Indonesia, the government or NGOs could facilitate a heritage crowdfunding platform, allowing the broader public (including diaspora) to directly contribute to preservation projects.

Economic Benefits and Impact Mitigation: Our findings affirm that heritage tourism plays a positive role as an income source and employment generator, aligning with UNWTO reports that tourism is one of the top job creators globally. However, serious attention must be paid to potential negatives like leakage and inequality. The empirical study in Bali showing 51% of hotel revenue leaking out should ring alarm bells. Mitigation efforts could include localizing supply chains: requiring hotels/destinations to source a certain percentage locally (food, supplies) or mandating joint ventures with local businesses for big investments. Likewise, possibly imposing limits on foreign investment in sensitive heritage zones to ensure not all sectors are dominated by external capital. Foreign investment brings money and management, but a balance is needed to avoid marginalizing local communities economically.

a. Enrich Visitor Experience: Invest in technology and creative interpretation. Develop multi-language digital guide apps, use AR/VR tech to reconstruct history on-site, and train local guides in compelling storytelling. Hold regular cultural performances or events at heritage sites to add attraction and distribute visits year-round.
b. Integrated Sustainable Marketing: Continue digital strategies (social media, influencers) but infuse sustainability narratives. For instance, launch a campaign "Visit Heritage, Preserve Heritage" involving influencers to educate their followers. Bolster presence at international fairs and increase collaboration on heritage tour packages with airlines/OTAs. At the same time, build a brand image of heritage destinations as sustainable and responsible to attract high-quality tourists.

Based on the provided data, all five marketing strategies are considered effective for promoting heritage tourism in Indonesia. The top two priorities are almost tied in importance: "International tourism fairs and exhibitions" (4.03) and "Social media and digital marketing" (4.02). This indicates that a dual approach combining traditional face-to-face marketing with modern digital platforms is seen as the most effective strategy. "Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies" also scored very high at 3.98, highlighting the importance of working with key industry players to reach potential visitors. The data suggests that modern marketing channels

are more valued than traditional ones. "Influencer and content marketing" received a score of 3.84, while "Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media)" had the lowest score at 3.67. Although still considered effective, traditional media is viewed as less of a priority for heritage tourism promotion compared to digital and partnership-based strategies. Implementing the above recommendations should make Indonesia's heritage tourism more competitive as well as sustainable. Multi-party synergy is required, as the study shows, collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment are key to advancing heritage tourism as a national asset that benefits both present and future generations.

Table 32. Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?

Marketing strategies	M
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.	4,03
Social media and digital marketing.	4,02
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.	3,98
Influencer and content marketing.	3,84
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).	3,67

Moreover, interesting facts indicate that this sector has potential to be developed through innovation and collaboration. For example, user-generated content (UGC) such as tourist reviews and social media has proven effective in shaping the image of heritage destinations, particularly among young tourists (Gen Z), as well as increasing revisit loyalty (Sasongko et al, 2025). Additionally, community-based tourism practices implemented in Penglipuran Village, Bali, which recorded up to 3,500 visits per day in 2023, show that collaboration among residents and a local homestay rotation system can be an inclusive and sustainable model for heritage tourism development (Kemenpar, 2025). Thus, although Indonesia has immense cultural heritage wealth, the limited data system has prevented this potential from being fully utilized. To support preservation goals, community empowerment, and sustainable promotion, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive monitoring and visitation reporting system, not only for popular sites but for all heritage sites spread across Indonesia. This step is crucial so that heritage tourism planning and management can be conducted scientifically, measurably, and responsibly.

4.5. Case Country: Senegal

4.5.1. General Outlook of Heritage Tourism in Senegal

Senegal, located at the westernmost tip of Africa, boasts an exceptionally rich tourist heritage, situated at the crossroads of African, European, and Arab influences. This heritage, both tangible and intangible, is a major asset for the development of the national tourism sector. From emblematic historical sites such as Gorée Island, Saint-Louis, and the megaliths of Sine Ngayène, to highly diverse natural landscapes—Niokolo-Koba National Park, the Saloum Delta, and Lac Rose—the country offers a wide range of unique destinations, some of which are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

Beyond monuments and natural sites, Senegal's tourist heritage is also expressed through a vibrant culture: music, dance, crafts, gastronomy, traditional rites, and the legendary teranga (hospitality) of the Senegalese people. These cultural expressions form an essential component of national identity and an important resource for tourism development, reinforcing Senegal's reputation as one of West Africa's most welcoming destinations.

Tourism is a strategic economic sector in Senegal, contributing approximately 7.2% of GDP in 2024 and generating over 300,000 jobs (World Bank, 2025). The Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE) identifies tourism as a priority for economic diversification, sustainability, and inclusive development. Heritage tourism plays a particularly important role as it attracts visitors year-round, complements seasonal coastal tourism, and often generates higher per capita spending. Culturally motivated tourists stay longer (10–12 nights compared to 7 for leisure visitors) and spend more on locally produced goods and services, benefiting communities near heritage sites.

According to the World Economic Forum's Africa Tourism Report (2023), Southern Africa remains the continent's most competitive tourism region, though its progress has slowed. West Africa, on the other hand, has shown the fastest improvement in competitiveness, but still ranks lowest overall, hindered by gaps in ICT, tourism infrastructure, and natural resource development.

Senegal ranks 11th in Africa and 106th globally in tourism competitiveness, below Mauritius (54th), South Africa (61st), and Seychelles (62nd), but ahead of many other West African states. Table 33 presents Senegal's relative standing.

Table 33. Ranking of Tourism Competitiveness in Africa (2023)

Rank in Africa	Country	World Rank
1st	Mauritius	54th
2nd	South Africa	61st
3rd	Seychelles	62nd
4th	Egypt	65th
5th	Morocco	66th
6th	Namibia	81st
7th	Kenya	82nd
8th	Tunisia	85th
9th	Cape Verde	92nd
10th	Botswana	95th
11th	Senegal	106th

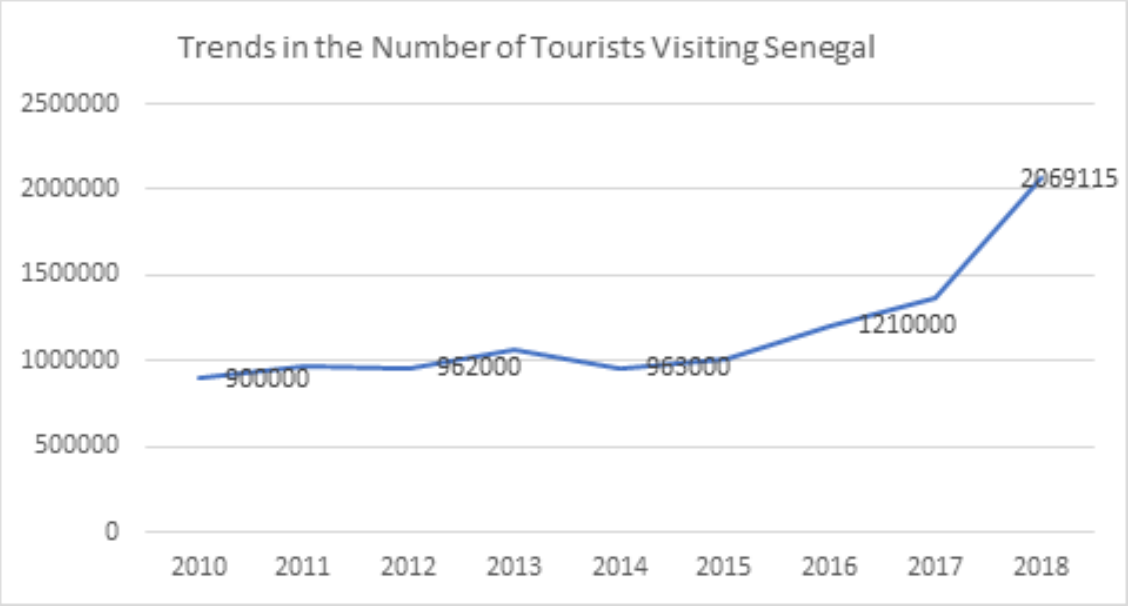
Source: (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Tourist arrivals have followed a fluctuating yet overall positive trajectory in the past decade. International visitors rose from 906,000 in 2010 to over 1 million in 2013, reflecting strong growth supported by improved marketing, hotel investments, and expanded air connectivity. However, arrivals dipped in 2014 to 963,000, due to external shocks such as the Ebola health crisis in West Africa and intensifying competition from other African destinations.

The sector demonstrated resilience, rebounding to 1,006,600 arrivals in 2015 and sustaining steady growth through 2017. This resurgence reflected efforts to reposition Senegal as a diversified destination, combining cultural tourism (Gorée, Saint-Louis), seaside tourism (Saly, Cap Skirring), and ecotourism (Niokolo-Koba, Saloum Delta). Enhanced air links and renewed investments under the PSE further boosted recovery. Figure 23 below illustrates the evolution

of international arrivals between 2010 and 2017, underlining both Senegal's vulnerability to external shocks and its capacity for quick recovery.

Figure 23. Total Number of International Tourists in Senegal (2010–2017)



Source: (Author, Data from the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.)

By 2023, arrivals had climbed to 1.6 million, with receipts totaling USD 1.6 billion. France and other European markets remain dominant, but Senegal is gaining traction among U.S. heritage travelers and the African diaspora. Religious and cultural events, including the Grand Magal of Touba and the Saint-Louis Jazz Festival, continue to drive high-volume domestic and international flows (UNWTO, 2025).

Senegal's outlook is shaped by its political stability, diaspora engagement strategy, and balanced portfolio of cultural and natural heritage assets. The government has emphasized sustainable tourism development, targeting not just economic gains but also conservation, community empowerment, and cultural pride. In this context, heritage tourism is not only an economic driver but also a vector of national identity, cultural diplomacy, and international visibility. With strategic investment, effective governance, and stronger global promotion, Senegal has the potential to consolidate its role as a flagship heritage destination in West Africa.

4.5.2. Development and Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Senegal

Senegal has a highly diverse cultural and natural heritage, which represents a fundamental advantage for the development of heritage tourism. This type of tourism, as Thiam (2020) points out, is based on the valorization of historical, cultural, intangible, and natural resources. It plays a strategic role in the dynamism of the local economy, while contributing to the preservation of cultural identities and the strengthening of social cohesion (Ndiaye, 2019).

The growth of heritage tourism in Senegal is rooted in an ancient legacy, enriched by the inscription of several sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among the most emblematic sites are Gorée Island, a powerful symbol of the transatlantic slave trade; the historic city of Saint-Louis; the megalithic circles of Sine Ngayène and Wanar; and Niokolo-Koba National Park. These iconic sites constitute the heart of the country's cultural tourism offering and demonstrate its historical depth and universal significance.

At the same time, intangible heritage plays a central role in the tourist experience. Oral traditions, traditional music, dances, artisanal know-how, culinary practices, as well as religious and initiation rituals offer visitors a unique immersion in Senegalese culture. This living heritage, passed down from generation to generation, enhances the authenticity and appeal of tourist sites, particularly in rural and community areas.

According to Sow and Fall (2022), current tourism development strategies in Senegal seek to deconcentrate tourist flows by promoting the emergence of new cultural destinations within the country. This approach is accompanied by targeted investments in infrastructure, the implementation of appropriate signage, skills building through professional training in the sector, as well as more structured promotion of heritage resources. As Ndiaye and Ba (2021) highlight, heritage preservation is now a cross-cutting national priority, requiring the joint mobilization of public institutions, local authorities, the private sector, civil society, and local communities. According to the qualitative data analysis, one participant from Senegal provided an example of how some of the responsible authorities could collaborate to promote the country's heritage tourism sector.

> *"I think that the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Culture, the Minister of Youth, they must work together. I can tell you that we have a swimming competition to join* Gorée *Island. They must promote it in Europe. It's not done. Each year some local swimmers are joining that are to* Gorée*. But no international. No international. Why don't they come to tell the weather is nice in Senegal from December to May or June? Why not making the international marathon of Dakar!"* (**P18**)

Tourism development in the 1970s and 1980s was dominated by the "3S" (sun, sea, sand) model along the Petite Côte (e.g., Saly, Mbour, Cap Skirring), supported by international tour operators and package tourism. However, at the same time, heritage tourism began to emerge as a complementary sector. The creation of Niokolo-Koba National Park and Djoudj Bird Sanctuary, both inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1981, marked a decisive shift toward nature-based and heritage tourism (UNESCO, 2024a). Gorée Island's inscription as Senegal's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978 further boosted its international visibility.

The 1990s ushered in economic liberalization and reforms in the tourism sector, which encouraged diversification beyond coastal tourism. As part of these efforts, heritage tourism gained prominence in government strategies and donor-funded projects. The inscription of Saint-Louis (2000) and the Stone Circles of Senegambia (2006, jointly with The Gambia) on the UNESCO World Heritage List reinforced Senegal's international recognition. This period also saw the rise of event-based heritage tourism, such as the Saint-Louis Jazz Festival (founded in 1993) and the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art (launched in 1996). These events combined heritage venues with contemporary cultural expression, attracting a cosmopolitan audience and enhancing Senegal's cultural tourism appeal.

In the past two decades, Senegal has moved toward a multi-pillar tourism model, where heritage and culture play an increasingly central role alongside coastal leisure and business travel. The Plan Sénégal Émergent (2014–) identified cultural tourism as a growth niche, emphasizing diversification and sustainability. Several heritage inscriptions strengthened Senegal's profile: the Bassari Country (2012), a cultural landscape of the Bassari, Fula, and Bedik peoples, showcased the importance of rural and community-based tourism models.

At the same time, Gorée Island consolidated its role as a global site of memory for their ancestors. High-profile visits — including by Pope John Paul II (1992), Nelson Mandela (1997), Barack Obama (2013), and Emmanuel Macron (2018) — reinforced its symbolic importance and

drew global media attention. Diaspora tourism, especially African American and Afro-Caribbean visitors, has since become a cornerstone of Senegal's heritage tourism market.

Heritage tourism in Senegal is distinguished by its exceptional diversity, combining cultural, natural, and intangible elements within a relatively compact geographic area. This diversity provides the country with a strong comparative advantage in the African tourism market. Unlike destinations that rely predominantly on one form of attraction (such as beach resorts or wildlife safaris), Senegal integrates multiple narratives — precolonial, colonial, Islamic, natural, and contemporary cultural — into a single tourism offer. This multifaceted heritage allows for the development of thematic circuits and immersive visitor experiences, while also strengthening Senegal's identity as a cultural and memory destination. The following are main characteristics of heritage tourism in Senegal as dislayed in Table 34.

Table 34. Key Characteristics of Heritage Tourism in Senegal I

Characteristic	Description	Examples / Illustrations
Diversity of Narratives	Multiple layers of history and heritage co-exist, appealing to varied visitor motivations.	Megalithic circles of Sine Ngayène and Wanar (precolonial); Gorée Island & Saint-Louis (colonial); Touba Grand Mosque (Islamic); Niokolo-Koba National Park & Djoudj Bird Sanctuary (natural).
Integration of Cultural and Natural Assets	Tourism products often combine cultural and ecological experiences, extending visitor stays.	Saint-Louis city tours combined with Djoudj Bird Sanctuary; Bassari villages paired with Niokolo-Koba safaris.
Intangible Heritage as a Driver	Oral traditions, performing arts, crafts, rituals, and gastronomy provide authenticity and immersive experiences.	*Mbalax* music, griot storytelling, glass painting (*sous-verre*), traditional wrestling, Kankurang masquerade, Xooy divination ceremony.
Diaspora and Memory Tourism	Sites of memory attracting emotionally motivated diaspora visitors.	Gorée Island's *Maison des Esclaves* as a pilgrimage site for African American and Afro-Caribbean travelers.
Festival and Event Tourism	Cultural and religious events reinforce heritage tourism and generate repeat visitation.	*Dak'Art* Biennale (Dakar); Saint-Louis Jazz Festival; Grand Magal of Touba.
Community-Based Approaches	Local associations manage tourism initiatives, ensuring equitable benefits and cultural preservation.	Homestays and guided circuits in Bassari Country; craft cooperatives in Casamance.
International Cooperation	Partnerships enhance site conservation, capacity-building, and global recognition.	UNESCO projects for Gorée and Saint-Louis; World Bank heritage initiatives; ICOMOS/ICCROM training programs.

Senegal presents a layered history that appeals to different visitor motivations including Precolonial heritage: The megalithic circles of Senegambia (Sine Ngayène and Wanar) and the Bassari Country cultural landscapes; Colonial heritage: Gorée Island and the colonial city of Saint-Louis, with their preserved architecture and urban fabric; Islamic heritage: Touba's Great

Mosque and pilgrimage routes, as well as Tivaouane's religious centers; Natural heritage: UNESCO-listed parks such as Niokolo-Koba and Djoudj, plus the Saloum Delta and Lac Rose.

Senegalese tourism frequently combines cultural discovery with ecological exploration. For instance, visitors to Saint-Louis often extend their stay to visit Djoudj Bird Sanctuary, while trips to Bassari villages are paired with wildlife viewing in Niokolo-Koba. This blending of cultural and natural attractions strengthens product diversification and extends visitor stays. Senegal's intangible heritage also enriches the tourist experience and enhances authenticity. Oral traditions, griot storytelling, mbalax music, dance performances, artisanal crafts (weaving, leatherwork, glass painting), and traditional wrestling (la lutte sénégalaise) are major attractions. Rituals such as the Kankurang masquerade and the Xooy divination ceremony have UNESCO recognition, underscoring their international cultural value.

Diaspora and Memory Tourism is another important heritage characteristic in Senegal. Gorée Island serves as a global site of memory for dark tourism, attracting emotionally motivated diaspora visitors from North America and the Caribbean. Universities, cultural associations, and heritage-focused tour operators organize dedicated itineraries, making memory tourism one of Senegal's most important and distinctive heritage niches.

Senegal hosts internationally recognized cultural events that are closely tied to heritage sites such as: The Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art (Dakar); The Saint-Louis Jazz Festival (in the UNESCO-listed colonial city); The Grand Magal of Touba, one of Africa's largest pilgrimages. These events combine heritage venues with cultural performance, creating synergies between tangible and intangible heritage.

Community-Based Approaches are also seen in Senegal's heritage toursim. For example, in the Bassari Country and Casamance region, community associations manage homestays, cultural circuits, and craft markets. These models ensure that tourism revenues support local livelihoods while preserving cultural traditions. They also provide visitors with more authentic and participatory experiences. Senegal's heritage sector also benefits from collaboration with UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, and development partners. Notable initiatives include the restoration of colonial buildings in Saint-Louis, coastal protection for Gorée, and training programs for heritage professionals. Such partnerships enhance conservation standards and boost Senegal's credibility as a sustainable heritage destination.

Despite significant progress, challenges remain, including insufficient infrastructure, limited conservation funding, and pressures on fragile sites from unsupervised visits. To address these, Senegal is increasingly adopting a sustainable, participatory, and inclusive approach to heritage tourism development, prioritizing community engagement and cross-sectoral cooperation (Sow & Fall, 2022; Ndiaye & Ba, 2021). In conclusion, heritage tourism in Senegal is a growing sector, bringing major economic, social, and cultural benefits. If supported by coherent policies and a strong collective commitment, it can significantly enhance Senegal's international visibility, ensure the preservation and transmission of its heritage, and improve the living conditions of local populations.

4.5.3. Heritage Tourism Assets in Senegal

Senegal offers an exceptional portfolio of cultural, historical, religious, and natural heritage resources, representing one of its most valuable assets for tourism development. At the crossroads of African, European, and Arab civilizations, the country presents a diverse set of attractions, many of which are internationally recognized by UNESCO. Beyond tangible heritage, Senegal's intangible traditions provide visitors with immersive cultural experiences, ranging from music and oral traditions to rituals and gastronomy. Together, these assets constitute the

foundation of Senegal's heritage tourism offer and play a central role in both national identity and international visibility. The following are the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and Intangible Cultural Heritage in Senegal.

Table 35. UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Senegal

	Site Name	Location	Year Inscribed	Type	Description
1	Island of Gorée	Dakar Region	1978	Cultural	Former hub of the forced diaspora of African peoples; preserved colonial architecture; Maison des Esclaves.
2	Niokolo-Koba National Park	Tambaco unda & Kédougou	1981	Natural	One of West Africa's largest protected areas; elephants, lions, chimpanzees, rare flora and fauna.
3	Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary	Saint-Louis	1981	Natural	Wetland complex that hosts over 1.5 million migratory birds annually, including pelicans and flamingos.
4	Island of Saint-Louis	Saint-Louis	2000	Cultural	First French settlement in Africa; preserved colonial grid plan and architecture.
5	Bassari Country (Bassari, Fula & Bedik Cultural Landscapes)	Kédougou	2012	Cultural Landsca pe	Traditional villages, terraced agriculture, sacred groves and rituals.
6	Stone Circles of Senegambia*	Kaolack & Tambaco unda	2006	Cultural	Megalithic funerary monuments dating back to the 3rd century BCE. Shared with The Gambia.

* Transboundary site with The Gambia.

Table 36. UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in Senegal

Year	Element	Domain	Description
2005	Kankurang Masquerade (with The Gambia)	Rituals & Social Practices	Male initiation rite of Manding communities; combines performance, spirituality, and social education.
2013	Xooy Ceremony of the Serer People	Oral Traditions & Rituals	Annual divination ceremony led by Saltigues; guides agricultural and social life of communities.

Senegal's heritage assets are exceptionally diverse, spanning sites of memory, colonial towns, sacred religious centers, museums, performing arts, and natural reserves. This multiplicity allows Senegal to appeal to varied market niches: cultural and diaspora tourists, faith-based pilgrims, ecotourists, adventure seekers, and urban cultural visitors. While Gorée and Saint-Louis remain flagship attractions, emerging heritage destinations — such as the Bassari

Country, Saloum Delta, and Lompoul Desert — hold significant potential for deconcentrating flows and achieving a more balanced tourism geography. Here is a list of overall heritage attractions in Senegal.

Table 37. Consolidated Heritage Tourism Assets in Senegal

Category	Key Assets	Significance
UNESCO Cultural Sites	Gorée Island, Saint-Louis Island, Stone Circles of Senegambia, Bassari Country.	Sites of memory of the forced displacement of African peoples, colonial heritage, prehistoric monuments, and living cultural landscapes.
UNESCO Natural Sites	Niokolo-Koba National Park, Djoudj Bird Sanctuary.	Biodiversity hotspots, eco-tourism, migratory bird sanctuaries.
UNESCO Intangible Heritage	Kankurang Masquerade, Xooy Ceremony.	Living traditions, initiation rites, spiritual guidance
Historical/Urban	African Renaissance Monument, IFAN Museum, Sandaga/Kermel Markets, Sorano Theatre, Village des Arts, Independence Square, Faidherbe Bridge	Colonial heritage, post-independence monuments, creative hubs.
Religious	Touba Mosque, Tivaouane Mosque, Dakar Great Mosque, Mosque of the Divinity, Dakar Cathedral, Gorée Church, Keur Moussa Monastery	Pilgrimage centers, interfaith heritage, Sufi brotherhoods.
Natural	Saloum Delta, Casamance, Bandia, Fathala, Lompoul Desert, Hann Park, Lac Rose, Magdalen Islands.	Ecotourism, safaris, desert landscapes, marine heritage.

4.5.4. Challenges for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Senegal

Despite the richness and diversity of its cultural, historical, and natural heritage, Senegal continues to face major challenges in transforming heritage tourism into a fully sustainable and inclusive sector. These challenges are not limited to one dimension but cut across environmental, social, economic, governance, and infrastructural domains. Understanding them is essential in order to identify where efforts must be concentrated to ensure that heritage tourism can become both a driver of development and a mechanism for preserving cultural identity. These challenges are detailed further below.

Environmental Challenges: One of the most pressing challenges to heritage tourism in Senegal is its vulnerability to environmental change. Many of the country's iconic sites are situated in fragile ecosystems that are increasingly threatened by coastal erosion, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Gorée Island, Saint-Louis, Rufisque, and Joal-Fadiouth, for example, face significant risks from rising sea levels and shoreline erosion, with more than 55 percent of Senegal's coastline already affected by these processes (Ndiaye et al., 2023). Inland, the Niokolo-Koba National Park suffers from deforestation, poaching, and agricultural encroachment, threatening its wildlife and undermining its ecotourism potential. Pollution and poor waste management also compromise natural and cultural sites alike, as seen in Lac Rose, where both salt-mining and mass tourism exert pressure on the ecosystem. Without large-scale investment in ecosystem restoration, sustainable water and waste management, and climate adaptation,

Senegal risks losing the very natural environments that underpin much of its tourism appeal (Fall & Diop, 2019).

Socio-Cultural Challenges: Senegal's cultural heritage is equally vulnerable, not because of physical degradation alone, but due to the risks of commodification and marginalization. Cultural expressions such as griot storytelling, traditional wrestling, initiation ceremonies, and musical performances are highly valued by visitors but can become reduced to staged spectacles when integrated into tourism without sensitivity (Diop, 2020). In communities such as those in Bassari Country or Casamance, residents often see limited returns from the tourism generated by their own cultural practices, leaving them economically marginalized even as their traditions are displayed for outsiders. A further layer of complexity arises in the management of sites of memory such as Gorée Island. For the African diaspora, Gorée is a place of mourning and reconnection, yet it is also one of Senegal's busiest tourist attractions. Balancing its symbolic value with the pressures of mass tourism and commercial souvenir trade is ethically challenging (Ndiaye, 2019). Heritage tourism in Senegal therefore faces the task of ensuring that cultural rights are respected, that communities are active participants in decision-making, and that cultural expressions are not stripped of authenticity in the pursuit of profit.

Economic Challenges: Although heritage tourism represents a growing sector of the Senegalese economy, it is marked by uneven distribution and financial fragility. The country remains overly reliant on a handful of flagship sites such as Gorée, Saint-Louis, and Lac Rose, which receive the bulk of investment and visitor flows, while other nationally and internationally significant sites, such as the megalithic circles or Niokolo-Koba, remain underdeveloped (Ndiaye & Ba, 2021). This concentration not only creates congestion and overuse of certain locations but also limits the broader economic impact of tourism. Conservation budgets remain inadequate, meaning that historic buildings, particularly in Saint-Louis, continue to deteriorate more quickly than they can be restored. Seasonality further undermines the sector, as arrivals peak between November and April but decline sharply in the rainy season, leading to income instability and short-term employment (Diouf, 2018; Sarr & Ndiaye, 2020). Added to this is the challenge of competition. Countries such as Morocco, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire have invested heavily in promoting their heritage and building infrastructure, leaving Senegal at a disadvantage in the regional and global tourism markets (Fall, 2018). Without diversification of heritage offerings, stronger territorial marketing, and better integration of tourism into local economies, Senegal's heritage tourism will remain vulnerable to both internal and external pressures.

Governance Challenges: Institutional and governance-related obstacles present another layer of difficulty for Senegal. Heritage management responsibilities are split across multiple ministries and agencies, resulting in overlapping jurisdictions and limited coordination (Ndiaye & Ba, 2022). Weak enforcement of existing protective laws allows unregulated construction and urbanization to continue near sensitive sites. Many restoration and conservation initiatives depend heavily on external donors such as UNESCO, the World Bank, or bilateral partners, which provides valuable resources but reduces national ownership and continuity. Human resource limitations further complicate governance. There is a shortage of skilled site managers, conservators, museum curators, and multilingual guides capable of delivering high-quality visitor experiences (Diouf, 2018). Museums, in particular, often struggle with outdated curation techniques, limited digital innovation, and static displays that do not meet the expectations of modern visitors. These institutional weaknesses highlight the need for integrated, participatory management systems that bring together state actors, local authorities, communities, and private stakeholders in shared governance frameworks.

Infrastructure Challenges: Finally, infrastructural needs remain one of the most visible barriers to the sustainable growth of heritage tourism. Many emblematic sites remain difficult to access due to poor road networks and limited domestic air services restricting the movement of visitors beyond coastal hubs. Even when visitors do reach heritage-rich inland regions, they often encounter an absence of basic services such as restrooms, signage, interpretation centers, and modern ticketing systems (UNWTO, 2019). Accommodation is heavily concentrated in Dakar, Saly, and Cap Skirring, leaving large parts of the country under-served. Moreover, Senegalese heritage sites lag behind in terms of digital infrastructure. Few offer online booking, virtual tours, or multilingual websites, reducing their visibility to global audiences (Diop & Ndiaye, 2020). These infrastructural shortcomings not only diminish the visitor experience but also prevent the equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits across the national territory.

According to the survey analysis, Table 38 displays visitors' experience ratings across five categories, with each category having a mean score (M). The highest-rated aspects of the visitor experience are the *Quality of guided tours and interpretation services* and *Safety and security at heritage sites*, both with a mean score of 3.44. The lowest-rated aspect is the Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours), which received a mean score of 2.89.

Table 38. Visitors' experience ratings.

Visitors' experience	M
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.	3,44
Safety and security at heritage sites.	3,44
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).	3,22
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.	3,00
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).	2,89

Table 39. Key Challenges of Heritage Tourism in Senega

Dimension	Main Challenges	Examples
Environmental	Coastal erosion, biodiversity loss, pollution	Gorée Island, Saint-Louis, Saloum Delta, Niokolo-Koba
Socio-Cultural	Commodification of traditions, community marginalization, diaspora memory dilemmas	Bassari rituals, griot storytelling, Gorée Island
Economic	Over-reliance on flagship sites, weak funding, seasonality, global competition	Saint-Louis colonial decay, megalithic circles, reliance on coastal hubs
Governance	Fragmented responsibilities, weak enforcement, donor dependency, shortage of skills	Overlapping ministries, reliance on UNESCO/AFD, lack of trained guides
Infrastructure	Poor access, inadequate facilities, weak digital presence	Niokolo-Koba, Bassari Country, Casamance

As displayed in table 39 the sustainability of Senegal's heritage tourism thus depends on addressing a set of interrelated challenges that are environmental, socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and infrastructural in nature. Coastal erosion, biodiversity loss, and pollution threaten the survival of iconic sites. Cultural commodification and community marginalization

undermine authenticity and equity. Over-reliance on a few flagship sites, insufficient funding, and seasonal dependency limit economic resilience, while governance fragmentation and weak capacity reduce the effectiveness of preservation policies. Infrastructure deficits further isolate regions and constrain visitor flows. Taken together, these issues illustrate the urgent need for an integrated and inclusive approach. If Senegal succeeds in mobilizing resources, strengthening governance, empowering communities, and diversifying its tourism base, its extraordinary heritage can serve as both a source of national pride and a driver of sustainable, competitive development.

As per survey analysis, Table 40 presents the governance challenges that most impact heritage tourism development in Senegal, as rated by 9 respondents. The most significant challenge identified is the Lack of inter-agency coordination (M = 3.67). The least impactful challenge is Political instability (M = 3.22). Senegal is one of the most stable countries in the region; however, the ordination between different stakeholders and community engagement might be improved.

Table 40. What governance challenges most impacts heritage tourism?

Governance challenges	**M**
Lack of inter-agency coordination.	3,67
Insufficient community engagement.	3,44
Weak enforcement of regulations.	3,33
Political instability.	3,22

Table 41 presents the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism in Senegal, based on the mean scores of respondents. The most significant barrier is *Limited access to investment and funding* (M = 4.00), highlighting the challenges heritage sites face in securing sufficient financial support for development and preservation. Other major barriers include the *Unequal distribution of tourism benefits* (M = 3.89) and *Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand* (M = 3.78), which reflect concerns about fairness in revenue sharing and instability in income generation across the year. The least significant barrier identified is the *Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies* (M = 3.44). Overall, these findings suggest that while Senegal has potential for growth in heritage tourism, financial limitations, equity concerns, and demand seasonality remain pressing obstacles to achieving long-term economic sustainability.

Table 41. What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?

Key barriers	**M**
Limited access to investment and funding.	4,00
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.	3,89
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.	3,78
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.	3,44

Table 42. What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?

Biggest barriers	**M**
Lack of funding for conservation.	3,67
Weak enforcement of regulations.	3,56
Climate change and environmental degradation.	3,44
Lack of awareness among tourists.	3,00
Over-tourism and overcrowding.	2,56

Table 42 presents the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism, based on the mean scores of the respondents. The most significant barrier is the *Lack of funding for conservation* (M

= 3.67). Other major barriers include *Weak enforcement of regulations* (M = 3.56) and *Climate change and environmental degradation* (M = 3.44). The least significant barrier identified is *Over-tourism and overcrowding* (M = 2.56). Considering Senegal is still growing at a destination, over tourism is not yet a significant problem.

4.5.5. Success Factors for Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development in Senegal

The sustainable development of heritage tourism in Senegal rests on several achievements that demonstrate the country's capacity to protect its cultural and natural resources while enhancing its attractiveness to visitors. Unlike future recommendations, which will be examined in the next section, the factors below reflect good practices already implemented that have contributed to positioning Senegal as a growing cultural and heritage destination.

A first notable success factor is the commitment to conservation and restoration of emblematic heritage sites. Gorée Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has benefited from long-standing preservation programs supported by UNESCO and bilateral cooperation, particularly from France and the European Union (UNESCO, 2025). Restoration efforts on its colonial houses, fortifications, and the House of Slaves have preserved both the material fabric and the symbolic value of the site. Similarly, Saint-Louis has witnessed successive urban rehabilitation projects aimed at safeguarding its colonial architecture and pier system, often with external funding and technical expertise (Diouf & Sarr, 2023; Ministry of Tourism of Senegal, 2024). These initiatives mirror the conservation practices found in other case countries, where systematic restoration programs form the backbone of heritage tourism.

Equally important is the integration of local communities into the tourism economy, particularly in rural and less urbanized regions. In the Bassari Country, a UNESCO-listed cultural landscape, local populations are directly involved in tourism activities through homestays, guiding, and craft sales. Community-based tourism projects in Casamance and the Saloum Delta further illustrate this participatory model, where residents benefit financially while simultaneously transmitting cultural knowledge (UNWTO, 2023). These practices echo Indonesia's emphasis on community empowerment as a cornerstone of sustainable heritage tourism.

The development of infrastructure also constitutes a significant achievement. While gaps remain, Senegal has invested in modernizing its international gateways, notably Blaise Diagne International Airport near Dakar and regional airports in Saint-Louis and Cap Skirring. Road improvements linking Dakar to heritage hubs like Saint-Louis and Gorée's improved ferry services have enhanced accessibility. Accommodation infrastructure has expanded in key areas, and although concentrated along the coast, these investments create reliable entry points for cultural tourism. As seen in Italy's case, where visitor management relies heavily on access infrastructure, Senegal's early improvements already provide a solid foundation.

Another success factor is continental positioning, international promotion and cultural visibility which has extended beyond national narratives to embrace a continental cultural leadership role. Senegal is not only presented as a destination for discovering local traditions and monuments but also as a symbolic center of African cultural identity. The African Renaissance Monument, inaugurated in 2010, stands as one of the tallest statues in Africa and a powerful emblem of continental rebirth, resilience, and unity; located on Dakar's Mamelles Hill and oriented toward the Atlantic Ocean, it symbolizes Senegal's role as a spokesperson for Africa's heritage. Cultural events also contribute strongly to this visibility: the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art, one of the continent's most prestigious art gatherings, transforms Dakar into a capital of creativity, while the Saint-Louis Jazz Festival bridges heritage and modernity by attracting global performers and affirming Senegal as a space where African and

international music converge. At the same time, global memory tourism reinforces Senegal's international visibility, with Gorée Island—through its House of Slaves and the Door of No Return—continuing to attract thousands of visitors annually, including world leaders, intellectuals, and members of the African diaspora, thereby positioning the country as a guardian of African memory and a site of global conscience (Touré, 2021; Ndiaye, 2022; UNESCO, 2025). Through this combination of monumental symbolism, artistic events, and global memory tourism, Senegal has succeeded in promoting itself not merely as a cultural destination but as a continental cultural leader, strengthening its tourism appeal, building diplomatic and symbolic capital, and integrating Senegalese heritage into broader narratives about Africa's place in the world.

Professionalization and training also support Senegal's heritage tourism development. Tour guides at Gorée and Saint-Louis are regularly praised for their multilingual abilities and capacity to contextualize complex historical narratives. Training programs offered by universities, NGOs, and tourism institutions have helped raise service quality standards (UNWTO, 2023). This mirrors Egypt's case, where long-standing institutions like the Supreme Council of Antiquities have built professional expertise to sustain heritage management.

Table 43. Success Factors in Senegal's Heritage Tourism

Success Factor	Good Practices Already Implemented	Impact on Sustainability
Conservation and Restoration	UNESCO-backed preservation of Gorée Island and Saint-Louis; biodiversity conservation in Niokolo-Koba and Saloum Delta	Safeguards heritage value, ensures compliance with international standards
Community Involvement	Community-based tourism in Bassari Country, Casamance, and Saloum; local crafts and homestays integrated into tourism circuits	Generates local income, strengthens ownership and cultural transmission
Infrastructure Development	Modernization of Blaise Diagne International Airport, rehabilitation of roads to Saint-Louis, ferry system for Gorée	Improves accessibility, increases visitor comfort
Continental Positioning, Promotion and Visibility	Gorée Island as global symbol of memory tourism; African Rennaissance Monument, international events such as Saint-Louis Jazz Festival and Dak'Art Biennale	Enhances global profile, attracts cultural tourists**,** reinforce Senegal's role as a continental cultural leader
Professionalization and Training	Multilingual guides at Gorée and Saint-Louis; training programs for cultural operators	Improves visitor experience and interpretation quality
Regulatory and Institutional Support	National heritage protection laws; UNESCO inscriptions; integration into Plan Sénégal Émergent (PSE)	Strengthens policy alignment and mobilizes resources

Source: Author, data from UNESCO (2025) and UNWTO (2023).

Finally, Senegal benefits from a regulatory and institutional framework that provides recognition and protection for heritage assets. National legislation classifies historic and cultural monuments, while UNESCO inscriptions (seven sites to date) secure international attention and resources. Moreover, heritage tourism has been explicitly incorporated into the government's Emerging Senegal Plan (Plan Sénégal Émergent, PSE), treating culture and tourism as strategic

levers for diversification (Diouf, 2024; UNESCO, 2025). This high-level policy alignment ensures that heritage preservation is not treated in isolation but as part of broader development objectives.

Taken together, these achievements illustrate Senegal's capacity to operationalize sustainable heritage tourism through a combination of conservation, community participation, infrastructure development, international promotion, professionalization, and regulatory support. With additional effort and strategies suggested under the recommendation ed practices section Senegal might utilize heritage resources in a much more sustainable and lucrative manner.

Table 44 outlines the marketing strategies that should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion in Senegal, according to the respondents. The most important strategy identified is *Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies* (M = 3.44). A tie follows this between *Social media and digital marketing* and *Influencer and content marketing*, both with a mean score of 3.33. The strategies considered least important *are International tourism fairs and exhibitions and Traditional advertising* (TV, radio, print media), both with a mean score of 3.11, reflecting the importance on e-marketing and corporate relationships with travel trade.

Table 44. Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?

Marketing strategies	**M**
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.	3,44
Social media and digital marketing.	3,33
Influencer and content marketing.	3,33
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.	3,11
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).	3,11

Table 45 presents the funding mechanisms that should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism, as rated by respondents. The highest-rated mechanism *is Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans)* (M = 3.89). This is followed by *Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits* (M = 3.67) and *Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development* (M = 3.56). The least important mechanism identified is *Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives* (M = 3.11).

Table 45. Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism?

Funding mechanisms	**M**
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).	3,89
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.	3,67
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.	3,56
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.	3,11

The findings on the sustainability of heritage tourism in Senegal highlight both strengths and critical areas for improvement. Respondents indicated that *heritage tourism policies largely promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices* (M = 3.22), while *heritage sites are moderately well-preserved and protected* (M = 3.00), suggesting the presence of a supportive policy framework. However, *visitor management measures* (M = 2.89) and *climate adaptation strategies* (M = 2.56) are perceived as insufficient, raising concerns about the long-term resilience of heritage resources. The lowest score relates to the economic benefits for *local communities* (M = 2.44), reflecting the limited effectiveness of community-based approaches in heritage tourism. Therefore, the key success factors for sustainable heritage tourism

development in Senegal include strengthening the implementation of existing policies, enhancing the protection of heritage sites, improving visitor management and climate adaptation strategies, and ensuring greater community participation and equitable economic benefits.

Table 46. Sustainability of heritage tourism in your country.

Sustainability of heritage tourism	M
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.	3,22
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.	3,00
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.	2,89
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).	2,56
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.	2,44

The results indicate that heritage tourism is perceived to generate notable economic benefits for local communities in Senegal. The highest-rated item emphasizes that *local businesses financially benefit from tourism* (M = 3.78), suggesting that heritage tourism serves as an important driver of local entrepreneurship and commercial activity. This is followed by the perception that *heritage tourism has created employment opportunities* (M = 3.67), highlighting its role in supporting livelihoods and reducing unemployment within host communities. However, the relatively lower mean score regarding the reinvestment of *tourism revenue into community development* (M = 3.33) points to a gap between the economic gains generated by tourism and their redistribution for broader societal benefits. These findings imply that while heritage tourism contributes to job creation and business growth, its long-term sustainability as a development strategy will depend on mechanisms that ensure the equitable reinvestment of revenues into local infrastructure, social services, and community well-being.

Table 47. Perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism.

Economic benefits	M
Local businesses benefit financially from tourism.	3,78
Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community.	3,67
Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development.	3,33

The survey findings suggest that heritage tourism projects in Senegal rely on a combination of international, governmental, and private sector support, with *international donors* such as UNESCO and the World Bank emerging as the most significant source of funding (M = 3.67). *Government grants and subsidies* also play a key role (M = 3.44), reflecting the importance of state intervention in sustaining heritage-related initiatives. *Private sector investments through public–private partnerships and entrance fees* (M = 3.22 each) constitute additional, though comparatively moderate, sources of revenue, indicating some level of diversification in funding strategies. Conversely, *tourism taxes* (M = 2.78), *branded product sales* (M = 2.67), and crowdfunding or community contributions (M = 2.89) received the lowest ratings, suggesting that these mechanisms remain underutilized or insufficiently developed. Overall, the results highlight a funding landscape that is still heavily dependent on external and governmental support, underlining the need to strengthen local revenue-generation models and community-based financial participation in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of heritage tourism

projects. Currently heavy reliance on international donors reflects the need to create alternative sources of funding.

Table 48. What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?

Primary sources	M
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).	3,67
Government grants and subsidies.	3,44
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).	3,22
Entrance fees.	3,22
Crowdfunding and community contributions.	2,89
Tourism taxes.	2,78
Branded Product sales.	2,67

4.5.6. Recommended Practices for Senegal

The sustainable development of heritage tourism in Senegal relies on a set of interdependent factors that ensure both the preservation of cultural and natural resources and the generation of positive social and economic benefits. These were also identified based on field research, interviews and focus groups with tourism experts in Senegal. Field visit assessments and expert consultations conducted as part of this study confirm the relative importance of the recommended practices for Senegal's heritage tourism. The diagram below illustrates how stakeholders — including site managers, local communities, and government officials — ranked these practices on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of priority for ensuring sustainability.

Figure 24. Importance of Recommendations on sustainable development of heritage tourism in Senegal

The results clearly show that heritage preservation and sustainable management (scoring 9/10) and community involvement (8/10) are perceived as the most critical levers for long-term success. These findings align with international studies emphasizing the centrality of protecting cultural and natural resources while ensuring that local populations are engaged in and benefit from tourism development (UNESCO, 2025; UNWTO, 2023). Infrastructure and training both score 7/10, reflecting recognition of their importance but also pointing to areas where targeted investment can yield significant improvements. Promotion and marketing receive a score of 6/10, suggesting that although visibility is important, stakeholders view it as secondary to conservation and inclusion. Finally, the regulatory framework and governance is rated 8/10, underlining the need for strong institutions and legal protections to anchor sustainable tourism strategies. When combined and implemented coherently, these strategies protect the integrity of sites while strengthening their attractiveness to national and international visitors, thereby transforming heritage tourism into a driver of sustainable development and cultural identity preservation (UNESCO, 2025; UNWTO, 2023). These recommendations are further explored below.

Heritage Preservation and Sustainable Management: Heritage preservation remains the central pillar of any sustainable tourism strategy in Senegal. Tangible and intangible assets — from Gorée Island and Saint-Louis to oral traditions and initiation rituals — must be safeguarded through rigorous conservation programs. This involves restoration of structures, ecosystem protection, and implementation of monitoring tools capable of detecting threats at an early stage. UNESCO (2025) underlines that effective management plans should account for anthropogenic pressures, climate risks, and evolving tourism practices. Equally important is the regulation of visitor flows to prevent overtourism. Measures such as limiting daily visitors, establishing marked trails, and introducing ecological rest periods can mitigate the deterioration of sites (UNWTO, 2023). Finally, preservation must incorporate community participation: involving local populations in site monitoring and maintenance strengthens their sense of ownership while combining technical expertise with traditional knowledge, creating conservation approaches that are both scientifically sound and socially grounded.

Community Involvement and Local Benefits: The sustainability of Senegal's heritage tourism also depends on the equitable integration of local communities. As guardians of cultural resources, residents must be part of governance and decision-making processes, ensuring that tourism development reflects local realities. Mechanisms such as consultation platforms, participatory management committees, and transparent information-sharing should become standard practice (UNWTO, 2023). Economic benefits must also be tangible: heritage tourism should create direct jobs (guides, hoteliers, restaurateurs) and indirect jobs (artisans, local producers), supported by vocational training, microenterprise development, and promotion of traditional know-how. Studies show that when benefits are shared equitably, communities are more committed to heritage preservation (Diouf & Sarr, 2023; Ministry of Tourism of Senegal, 2024). In addition, engaging the African diaspora through specialized circuits and memory tourism packages would strengthen cultural ties while expanding Senegal's global tourism market.

Infrastructure and Accessibility: The development of heritage tourism is strongly conditioned by infrastructure quality. Optimal accessibility — by road, sea, or air — is essential to attract and retain visitors. Investments should prioritize the modernization of access routes to inland sites, the improvement of signage, and sustainable transport solutions adapted to local contexts. Reception infrastructure — such as interpretation centers, public restrooms, and rest areas — must meet international standards while reflecting local aesthetics to preserve site authenticity. Environmentally sustainable practices should underpin all infrastructure development,

including the use of renewable energy, efficient waste management, and eco-friendly materials (UNWTO, 2023; Ministry of Tourism of Senegal, 2024). Such measures not only improve the visitor experience but also reduce the sector's ecological footprint and strengthen climate resilience.

Responsible Promotion and Marketing: Heritage tourism promotion must highlight Senegal's authenticity and diversity while avoiding the risks of overtourism. Balanced strategies should employ digital tools, narrative storytelling, and community-centered campaigns to reach audiences sensitive to heritage preservation (UNWTO, 2023). Responsible marketing also requires managing tourist flows by promoting thematic routes, highlighting lesser-known sites, and spreading demand across the year to mitigate seasonality (Ministry of Tourism of Senegal, 2024). At the same time, Senegal should consolidate its positioning as both a national and continental cultural hub. The African Renaissance Monument, the Dak'Art Biennale of Contemporary African Art, the Saint-Louis Jazz Festival, and Gorée Island as a global symbol of memory position Senegal as Africa's cultural gateway. By targeting the African diaspora, regional African tourists, and international cultural travelers, Senegal can strengthen its visibility and diversify its markets (Touré, 2021; Ndiaye, 2022). According to the qualitative data analysis, one participant from Senegal (i.e., **P18**) emphasized the importance of leveraging the celebrity influence of certain social media personalities to promote the country's heritage tourism sector, as follows: *"Here we have a famous singer called Yusuf Nuhu. I think that they may discuss with him and many singers, many groups to decide to join for these events to promote Senegal."*

Training and Professionalization: The professionalization of tourism stakeholders is essential for ensuring quality services and enriching visitor experiences. Guides, site managers, artisans, and curators require solid training in heritage interpretation, intercultural mediation, languages, and hospitality. Continuous capacity building should also include modules on sustainable tourism and digital tools (UNWTO, 2023). Training programs for guides, curators, artisans, and site managers must be systematized and adapted to international standards. Modules should include heritage interpretation, intercultural mediation, foreign languages, customer service, and digital tools. As the Ministry of Tourism and Crafts (2024) recommends, the establishment of certifications, continuing education programs, and partnerships with universities can strengthen local expertise. Exchanges and internships with international institutions can further build capacity. Ultimately, a qualified and certified workforce enhances visitor satisfaction, increases competitiveness, and ensures that Senegalese heritage is presented in a compelling and respectful way.

Regulatory Framework and Institutional Cooperation: A strong regulatory framework is indispensable for sustainable heritage tourism. Laws should clearly define protection standards, operator obligations, and penalties for violations, while being regularly updated to reflect emerging issues such as climate change, erosion, poaching and digital heritage management. UNESCO (2025) stresses that effectiveness depends on both the clarity of standards and their consistent enforcement. Institutional cooperation must bring together ministries, local governments, communities, private operators, and international partners to implement integrated strategies. Participatory management committees at key sites would institutionalize transparency and accountability while ensuring cultural legitimacy. Programs with UNESCO, UNWTO, and IUCN demonstrate the benefits of multi-stakeholder collaboration. At the same time, governance must be participatory: involving communities in decision-making ensures that strategies reflect sociocultural realities and fosters legitimacy (Ndiaye, 2022; Touré & Fall, 2023). Monitoring, evaluation, and transparent reporting systems will be necessary to ensure accountability and prevent heritage degradation.

Table 49. Recommended Practices for Sustainable Heritage Tourism in Senegal

Area	Recommended Practices	Expected Outcomes
Heritage preservation and management	Regular site maintenance; monitoring tools; visitor flow regulation; climate adaptation measures (UNESCO, 2025; UNWTO, 2023)	Long-term conservation of fragile cultural and natural resources
Community involvement	Participatory governance; vocational training; artisan cooperatives; diaspora-focused circuits (Diouf & Sarr, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, 2024)	Equitable local benefits; stronger cultural identity; social commitment
Infrastructur and accessibility	Sustainable transport; modern signage; eco-friendly visitor facilities; universal access standards (UNWTO, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, 2024)	Greater accessibility; improved tourist experience; climate resilience
Promotion and marketing	Balanced communication; thematic tours; seasonal management; positioning Senegal as Africa's cultural hub (Touré, 2021; Ndiaye, 2022)	Enhanced visibility; diversified markets; reduced overtourism
Training and professionali zation	Heritage interpretation; intercultural mediation; certification systems; international exchanges (UNWTO, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, 2024)	Higher service quality; enriched visitor experience; increased competitiveness
Regulatory framework and cooperation	Updated laws; participatory committees; PPPs; monitoring and reporting mechanisms (UNESCO, 2025; Ndiaye, 2022; Touré & Fall, 2023)	Stronger governance; transparent management; long-term sustainability

In conclusion, the sustainable development of heritage tourism in Senegal requires a balanced strategy that builds on existing achievements while addressing persisting gaps. The recommended practices outlined above—ranging from rigorous site preservation and inclusive community engagement to sustainable infrastructure, responsible promotion, professional training, and stronger regulatory frameworks—represent mutually reinforcing strategies for ensuring long-term success. Field visit assessments confirm that preservation and community involvement are perceived as the most critical priorities, yet all six dimensions are interdependent and must be pursued in tandem to maximize impact. By adopting an integrated, participatory, and forward-looking approach, Senegal can not only safeguard its exceptional cultural and natural assets but also position itself more firmly as Africa's cultural gateway. In doing so, heritage tourism will become both a source of national pride and a catalyst for inclusive economic growth, cultural resilience, and international visibility.

5. Roadmap and Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations chapter will provide an overview of heritage tourism in OIC based on empirical data and case countries and offer a strategic roadmap and actionable steps to improve the quality and sustainability of heritage tourism in OIC countries. These recommendations are categorized under two main classifications: roadmap to minimum standards and good practices. Minimum standards will refer to foundational principles and necessary actions, such as the preservation and protection of heritage sites and the establishment of legal and administrative frameworks. Good practices, on the other hand, will represent advanced strategies that can enhance the overall quality of heritage tourism, governance, funding, and marketing efforts.

5.1 Overview of Heritage Tourism in OIC and Environmental Analysis

5.1.1. Qualitative insights and quantitative survey findings

This section combines what is discussed in the prior chapters and empirical data analysis findings (e.g., qualitative and quantitative data) analytically to evaluate overall strategies in improving the quality and sustainability of OIC countries' heritage tourism. In the qualitative phase, interviews with a total of 18 participants from the case countries were collected and subjected to a theme analysis with the support of the NVIVO program. Furthermore, quantitative data obtained from the total survey from the case countries were analyzed using descriptive analysis in the SPSS package program. In order to identify the strategies to improve the quality of heritage tourism in the OIC countries, 130 surveys collected from case countries and other OIC countries were used.

5.1.1.1. Service Performance

Service performance is a key driving factor for the success of tourism destinations (Pektas & Hassan, 2020). In OIC countries, service performance is a significant aspect in the success of heritage tourism destinations. This is because it affects travel satisfaction, recommendation, and loyalty, and it additionally makes these culturally rich sites more competitive and promotes their evolution in terms of sustainability.

According to the qualitative analysis, most participants noted that having an effective site management plan triggers superior quality, especially in the context of shaping the quality of the offered heritage experiences. Such sub-themes as having demand analysis, accessibility of the site, availability of tourism business infrastructure, KPI-based heritage governance, and being ready for AI-driven transformation were grouped under the service performance sub-theme. For example, **P1** emphasized the importance of ensuring the accessibility of the heritage sites and the availability of other tourism infrastructures and surrounding services as part of the development of holistic heritage tourism planning as follow: *"When establishing a tourism product related to the museum or visit of cultural heritage elements, it is important to establish tourism centers around them and to create and provide the right service chains."* Likewise, another participant (i.e., **P13**) stated:

> *"Services and products are considered successful if they reflect authenticity, support preservation and conservation efforts, involve the local community, and provide quality education through engaging storytelling. Accessibility is essential in terms of services and in providing an unforgettable experience, thereby ensuring sustainability."*

Table 50 also presents respondents' evaluations of visitors' experience ratings, where the quantitative data also confirm the qualitative results, demonstrating consistency between participants' perceptions and the broader patterns emerging from the survey findings. The highest-rated factor is the *accessibility of heritage sites* (M = 3.71), suggesting that visitors place significant value on ease of access as a core element of service quality. This is closely followed by the quality of guided tours and interpretation services (M = 3.68) and *cleanliness and maintenance of sites* (M = 3.67), both of which indicate that professional service delivery and well-maintained environments are critical for enhancing visitor satisfaction. *Safety and security at heritage sites* (M = 3.61) received relatively lower ratings, reflecting potential concerns regarding risk management and visitor protection. The lowest-rated dimension is *the availability of interactive and immersive experiences*, such as storytelling or virtual reality tours (M = 3.53), highlighting a gap in innovative and technology-driven service offerings. Overall, these results emphasize that while basic service elements like accessibility and cleanliness are relatively well-regarded, there is room for improvement in safety measures and the integration of immersive, experience-based services that could enrich visitors' overall heritage tourism experience.

Table 50. Visitors' experience ratings.

Visitors' experience	**M**
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).	3,71
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.	3,67
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.	3,68
Safety and security at heritage sites.	3,61
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).	3,53

The service performance sub-theme also relates more to performing an efficient demand response for the heritage tourism sector. The service performance is strongly related to ensuring that heritage tourism sites can respond to demand promptly, ensuring that visitors' demands are fulfilled while also adapting to the evolving requirements of the industry (Ribaudo & Figini, 2017). Hence, most participants from the qualitative phase considered demand analysis as a crucial managerial process that involves researching and assessing tourists' demand for a specific tourism product or service. In this regard, **P3** noted:

> *"[...] First and foremost, cultural heritage tourism must correctly understand the demand for cultural heritage. [...] For example, you come to Türkiye as a cultural heritage tourist, a German, and you want to experience cultural heritage elements. Here, you want to not only visit cultural sites like Side and Aspendos within the context of cultural tourism but also experience the cultural elements of Turkish cuisine."*

Given the pressing need for AI-driven transformation in adapting to new market segments such as digital nomads, the transformation journey of heritage tourism in OIC countries constitutes a vital factor for generating higher revenue and sustainably managing the intensity of visitor flows. In this manner, employing AI technologies not only allows easily to allocate resources more intelligently and provide visitors with customized digital experiences, but also facilitate sustainable management of heritage tourism by supporting data-driven decision-making, improving service efficiency, and enhancing the global visibility of cultural assets. This is in line with Cifci et al. (2024), who stress the importance of data to create agile strategies and develop countermeasures. Supporting this, **P8**: *"Cultural tourism is now a vibrant activity, year-round. Even in the winter, cultural tourism helps guides find work. In 50 years, this field will evolve into a much more digitalized platform that also connects with a more informed consumer."* Lastly, one

of the participants pointed out another key issue about KPI-based heritage governance in enhancing service quality. **P15** mentioned:

> *"Effective heritage site management requires the use of clear key performance indicators (KPIs). One important KPI is the regulation of visitor numbers to prevent overcrowding and ensure the site's physical and cultural preservation. Limiting the number of visitors helps maintain the site's integrity and enhances the quality of the visitor experience. "*

Table 51 presents respondents' perceptions of the key performance indicators (KPIs) used to measure heritage tourism governance. The highest-rated KPI is *global recognition* (M = 4.10), emphasizing the importance of international acknowledgment in assessing heritage tourism success. This is followed by *visitor numbers and tourism revenue* (M = 4.05), indicating that economic returns remain a central consideration in governance. *Sustainability practices and environmental impact* (M = 3.98) also score highly, reflecting growing awareness of ecological responsibilities. *Community engagement and local benefits* (M = 3.95) are considered slightly less important but still significant, underscoring the social dimension of heritage tourism. The lowest-rated KPI is the *conservation status of heritage sites* (M = 3.82), suggesting that although preservation is valued, it may be perceived as less directly measurable or prioritized compared to economic and global recognition indicators.

Table 51. What key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to measure heritage tourism governance?

Key performance indicators	M
Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards).	4,10
Visitor numbers and tourism revenue.	4,05
Sustainability practices and environmental impact.	3,98
Community engagement and local benefits.	3,95
Conservation status of heritage sites.	3,82

5.1.1.2. Marketing

The analysis of qualitative data revealed that marketing attributes significantly impact the success of heritage destinations. Participants were asked about the marketing activities and communication channels used for branding, positioning, and promoting cultural heritage tourism destinations, as well as the initiatives (e.g., guided tours, interactive events) aimed at enhancing visitor experience (UNESCO, 2021a). Experiential marketing, positioning, place-based tourism innovation, digital global promotion, content creation for promotion, story-driven tourism promotion, tour guide accountability, influencer-powered promotion, expert-guided experience, use of Islamic heritage as driver, and tech-enhanced heritage via AR/VR were the themes grouped under this dimension.

Particularly, recent studies (e.g., Prasidya et al., 2025) show that AI-powered digital technologies play a crucial role in enhancing visitor experience by providing immersive and interactive engagement with heritage sites, thereby complementing conservation and accessibility efforts. As highlighted in the Türkiye case study, content creation and story-driven tourism promotions were emphasized by almost all participants as the most important marketing strategy for improving the quality and sustainability of heritage tourism. In this regard, **P4:**

"[...] In fact, this is where the marketing of heritage sites comes to the forefront: storytelling. Presenting and crafting this cultural heritage within a narrative framework, in line with current marketing trends, and, if possible, incorporating it into a route logic, paves the way for success."

Storytelling has been widely emphasized in academic literature as a critical strategy for enhancing heritage tourism experiences and engaging visitors (Novianti et al., 2022). Evidence from qualitative analysis confirms that heritage tourism destinations with a story better market and quickly incorporate their positioning, innovations, and financial prospects into the global heritage market. About this, **P13** noted:

"Authentic and original cultural heritage products, with complete and engaging information and storytelling delivered to visitors, resulting in a memorable experience. This experience fosters a sense of love for the destination, encouraging tourists to help preserve its cultural heritage."

Table 52 displays how respondents assessed marketing techniques that should be given more attention to promote the heritage tourism of OIC countries. These results indicate not only how important different marketing strategies are in comparison to each other, but also how heritage destinations can enhance their visibility and competitiveness in global markets. The findings further underscore the pivotal significance of properly designed marketing strategies in attracting a vast array of tourist types and acquiring the sustained expansion of heritage tourism in OIC nations, by correlating the results with larger qualitative frameworks. The highest-rated strategy is *social media and digital marketing* (M = 4.10), indicating that respondents view online platforms as the most effective channel for reaching global audiences and engaging younger generations. This result aligns with the study of Armutcu et al. (2023), who highlighted the crucial role of digital marketing and social media in shaping tourist behavior, and with the work of Kasemsarn and Nickpour (2025), who emphasized the potential of social media integration and digital storytelling frameworks in engaging younger audiences within cultural and heritage tourism. This is followed by *international tourism fairs and exhibitions* (M = 4.00), which highlight the continuing importance of face-to-face promotion and networking opportunities in attracting international visitors and industry stakeholders. Strategies such as *influencer and content marketing* (M = 3.93) and *partnerships with airlines and travel agencies* (M = 3.98) received moderately high ratings, suggesting that collaboration with industry actors and leveraging digital opinion leaders are perceived as valuable but secondary approaches. By contrast, *traditional advertising methods* (M = 3.60), such as television, radio, and print media, received the lowest score, reflecting a decline in their perceived effectiveness compared to digital and experiential marketing strategies.

Table 52. Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?

Marketing strategies	**M**
Social media and digital marketing.	4,10
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.	4,00
Influencer and content marketing.	3,93
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.	3,98
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).	3,60

Along with this, it was also particularly emphasized that the story should be used as a good experiential experience tool with the talent of tour guides or that the story should be digitized and promoted by influencers, experts, and celebrities. This result aligns with Demirkol and Cifci's (2020) study, which highlighted the celebrity effect on destination marketing. In this

regard, one of the participants (i.e., **P4**) from Türkiye described his country's heritage marketing success as follows:

> *"Go Turkey" [Türkiye's official tourism promotion platform] accounts have reached very high follower numbers on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook, and are constantly promoting Türkiye's cultural heritage with engaging content. There are also ongoing marketing efforts spanning 12 months, including press, influencer, and expert-supported hosting events, and direct marketing efforts that showcase their cultural heritage through their own words."*

5.1.1.3. Managerial and Administrative Challenges

Given the variety of challenges of improving the quality and sustainability in heritage tourism site management, participants were explicitly asked about the main challenges in heritage tourism, potential solutions to overcome these challenges, and strategies or action plans for the future development of heritage tourism. As per qualitative data analysis, more than half of the participants highlighted low heritage awareness and perception, ineffective governance, risk of urbanization, and limited finance are at play regarding as significant challenges against becoming and staying a heritage destination.

Table 53 also presents the perceptions of participants from the OIC countries of Türkiye, Senegal, and Indonesia regarding the managerial challenges encountered in heritage tourism (n = 130). The highest-rated items are the *weak enforcement of regulations* and *political instability*, both with a mean score of (M = 4.19). This indicates that participants perceive these two factors as the most significant obstacles for heritage tourism managers. Such external and systemic challenges create an unpredictable environment, making long-term planning and investment considerably difficult (Issa & Altinay, 2006). Closely following these is *the lack of inter-agency coordination*, with a mean score of (M = 4.15). This highlights the internal barriers that managers face when collaborating with various public and private sector institutions. The lack of coordination leads to bureaucratic hurdles, inefficiencies, and a failure to establish a holistic management approach for heritage tourism Popović, 2025). The lowest-rated item is *insufficient community engagement*, with a mean score of (M = 4.10). This indicates that poll participants saw it as less significant than the political and institutional impediments, but remaining a difficulty. This study suggests that the key concerns in heritage tourism management are the overarching systemic difficulties rather than localized dynamics.

Table 53. What governance challenges most impact heritage tourism?

Governance challenges	**M**
Weak enforcement of regulations.	4,19
Political instability.	4,19
Lack of inter-agency coordination.	4,15
Insufficient community engagement.	4,10

While tangible heritage assets have traditionally gained major attention, the relevance of intangible heritage is increasingly acknowledged, inspiring programs such as UNESCO's efforts to conserve and promote these cultural manifestations. For example, many European heritage-tourism assets, whether tangible or intangible, typically evolve within the UNESCO framework, which prioritizes outstanding universal value, authenticity and integrity, community engagement, and long-term preservation. Their effective tourism utilization relies on meticulous interpretation, visitor management and distribution, and integration with local economies (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). In this regard, participants from the qualitative study noted the tangible heritage focus, divergent heritage perspectives, embodied heritage, hidden

underwater heritage, lack of regional brand identity, low public awareness, and limited host-guest engagement issues. For example, **P10** noted that tangible heritage elements are predominantly relied upon as follows: *"[...] tangible heritage—like archaeological sites—is more frequently commercialized."* Another participant from Türkiye, **P5,** noted the embodied culture of heritage site residents as follows:

> *"We have a Hamam culture. It's a perfect culture. Now, the problem lies with the Turkish people: how many people go to Hammams today? You are not doing it to clean yourself. You're doing it because it is a culture. [...] Otherwise, the purpose isn't to bathe there. [...]."*

Confirming many academic studies (e.g., Licciardi & Administrative, 2019; Giupponi et al., 2024), participants also addressed the importance of having an effective governance structure for the improvement of infrastructure and market segmentation. **P13** mentioned: "*[...] Infrastructure development to improve accessibility and visitor facilities for the targeted segment without compromising the site's integrity."* Gentrification and commodification of heritage destinations were also mentioned by many participants as negative aspects of urbanization associated with heritage tourism. As many studies argue, the commodification (e.g., Cohen & Cohen, 2012) and gentrification (e.g., Gotham, 2005) of cultural values—when they are increasingly reduced to mere economic goods—pose significant risks to the long-term sustainability and authenticity of heritage sites. Supporting this, **P15** from Indonesia states:

> *"To prevent commodification caused by over-tourism and ensure long-term site preservation, it is essential to implement conservation principles, including strict visitor limits and sustainable site management practices. These measures help protect both the physical structure of heritage sites and their surrounding ecosystems. For also socially, one of the major concerns is gentrification, which can displace local communities or alter their cultural identity. To mitigate this, residents should be actively involved in the planning and management of tourism initiatives [...]"*

Another issue highlighted by many participants in the qualitative findings, which should be considered as a managerial challenge for heritage sites in the OIC countries, is financing and funding. A recent study by Torrieri et al. (2025) also highlighted the fundamental need to diversify funding through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), philanthropy, and community contributions. Especially, except for the regular revenues from entrance fees, donations, tax and corporate sponsorship, lack of an effective revenue mechanism, limited site-based funding, participants frequently discussed high investment risk, and lack of funding autonomy issues. In this regard, **P15** highlighted:

> *"In some local cases, however, funding remains limited. Site managers often rely solely on modest sources such as parking fees and voluntary donations from visitors. While these contributions can support basic maintenance, they are usually insufficient for long-term preservation, infrastructure development, or professional management. Therefore, it is crucial to explore more structured and diversified funding strategies, including partnerships with government and private institutions, to ensure sustainable financing for heritage tourism initiatives."*

Table 54 shows the funding data and highlights a number of other management challenges, and the quantitative results further confirm this situation by aligning with the qualitative findings that emphasize the structural and financial barriers faced in heritage tourism management. The highest-rated funding sources are *international donors* (M = 4.18), *private sector investments* (M = 4.02), and entrance fees (M = 4.01), indicating that managers perceive these as their most

important sources of funding. Depending on external and private finance presents a managerial difficulty because of the necessity for intricate negotiations, adherence to stringent donor stipulations, and alignment with profit-oriented private sector objectives. Conversely, funding sources that are more directly tied to public or community support, *Government grants and subsidies* (M = 3.88), *Tourism taxes* (M = 3.78), and similarly, *branded product sales* (M = 3.76) are acknowledged as a supplementary source of revenue but not a primary driver. *Crowdfunding and community contributions* (M = 3.58) are rated as less significant. This suggests that managers may face difficulties in securing domestic public funding or mobilizing local financial support, forcing them to look to larger, often more complex, international and private partnerships.

Table 54. What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?

Primary sources	**M**
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).	4,18
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).	4,02
Entrance fees.	4,01
Government grants and subsidies.	3,88
Tourism taxes.	3,78
Branded Product sales.	3,76
Crowdfunding and community contributions.	3,58

Table 55 presents respondents' perceptions of the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism (n = 130). The highest-rated barrier is *limited access to investment and funding (M = 4.19)*, highlighting financial constraints as a critical obstacle to the sustainable development of heritage tourism. This is closely followed by the perception of *unequal distribution of tourism benefits* (M = 4.18), which suggests concerns about social equity and the exclusion of certain community groups from the economic gains of tourism. The issue of *leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies* (M = 4.01) was also rated highly, indicating apprehension that a significant portion of tourism income does not remain within local economies. The lowest-rated but still notable barrier is *seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand* (M = 3.94), reflecting challenges in maintaining stable income streams and year-round employment opportunities.

Table 55. What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?

Key barriers to economic sustainability	**M**
Limited access to investment and funding.	4,19
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.	4,18
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.	4,01
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.	3,94

5.1.1.4. Sustainable Balance

Threats and measures are considered two essential reciprocating indicators of sustainable balance (Rössler, 2023). The qualitative analysis further substantiated the existence of this interrelated relationship. As per quantitative data, threats are dimensioned around environmental (e.g., lack of regeneration, value co-destruction, climate change, disasters), social (e.g., heritage smuggling, vandalism, changing norms) and economic (e.g., less community engagement, over-commercialization, investment risk perception) problems that may occur in heritage tourism sites along with overtourism, and the measures are shaped by the recommendations for main precautions that can be taken against these threats (e.g., preservation, protective penalties, sustainability impact calculator, balancing tourism & conservation, community-based tourism, multi-stakeholder engagement, supporting local MSMEs, community empowerment and social inclusion).

While a significant majority of participants emphasized the risk of over-tourism, they also expressed the sustainability risks that may arise in heritage destinations due to excessive tourism movement. For example, **P10** noted: "We focus too much on quantity over quality. *[...]* We must respect the carrying capacity and ensure local communities benefit economically, to avoid conflict and fatigue." Likewise, **P15** stated:

> *"From an environmental perspective, the key issue is carrying capacity. To prevent over-tourism and ensure long-term site preservation, it is essential to implement conservation principles, including strict visitor limits and sustainable site management practices. These measures help protect both the physical structure of heritage sites and their surrounding ecosystems."*

Table 56 presents respondents' evaluations of the sustainability of heritage tourism in their country, with the quantitative evidence offering further confirmation of the challenges and opportunities previously highlighted in the qualitative findings. The highest-rated factor is *heritage tourism policies promoting environmental conservation and sustainable practices* (M = 3.55), suggesting that policy frameworks are perceived as a relatively strong driver of sustainability within the heritage tourism sector. This is closely followed by the *economic benefits for local communities* (M = 3.51), highlighting the recognition of heritage tourism as an important contributor to local development and livelihoods. By contrast, relatively lower ratings were given to the preservation and protection of *heritage sites against environmental and human threats* (M = 3.15) and to the effective implementation of *visitor management policies* (M = 3.07), pointing to ongoing challenges in operationalizing sustainability at the site level. Similarly, *climate adaptation strategies* (M = 3.07) such as flood protection and fire prevention received one of the lowest scores, underscoring a gap in resilience planning in the face of climate change risks.

Table 56. Sustainability of heritage tourism in your country

Sustainability of heritage tourism	**M**
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.	3,55
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.	3,51
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.	3,15
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.	3,07
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).	3,07

Furthermore, Table 57 presents respondents' evaluations of the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism. The highest-rated barrier is weak enforcement of regulations (M = 4.16), indicating that respondents perceive inadequate monitoring and implementation of policies as the most critical challenge undermining sustainability efforts. This outcome is consistent with Bhati's (2025) study, which emphasizes the necessity of effective implementation and enforcement of heritage conservation laws and programs to fulfill their objectives. This is followed by a *lack of funding for conservation* (M = 4.06), which highlights persistent financial constraints that limit effective preservation and management of heritage sites. Moderately high barriers include *over-tourism and overcrowding* (M = 3.98) and climate *change and environmental degradation* (M = 3.98), both of which reflect pressing global issues that directly threaten the integrity and resilience of heritage resources. Finally, *lack of awareness*

among tourists (M = 3.91) is also identified as a significant barrier, suggesting that insufficient visitor education and engagement hinder efforts to foster responsible and sustainable tourism practices.

Table 57. What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?

Biggest barriers to sustainability	**M**
Weak enforcement of regulations.	4,16
Lack of funding for conservation.	4,06
Over-tourism and overcrowding.	3,98
Climate change and environmental degradation.	3,98
Lack of awareness among tourists.	3,91

As highlighted from quantitative findings, a significant portion of the participants from qualitative phase also frequently focused on community-based tourism and multi-stakeholder engagement issues regarding threats that may arise from over-tourism. The qualitative data analysis supports these notions and highlights the importance of multi-stakeholder management for fostering more community-based heritage tourism development. **P13** highlighted: *"A holistic and collaborative approach among stakeholders is essential to ensure that heritage tourism remains preserved and continues to provide sustainable benefits for both current and future generations."*

In addition, Diouf (2018) noted the shortage of skilled site managers, conservators, museum curators, and multilingual guides capable of delivering high-quality visitor experiences. **P9** also highlighted the importance of supporting local MSMEs by letting them actively participate in tourism value chains and benefit from greater market visibility, economic integration, and capacity-building opportunities: *"All stakeholders need to be involved and internalized. First and foremost, raise awareness among the local population. If this is done, locals will be able to offer affordable products to tourists."* Along with this, for the success of improving the quality and sustainability in heritage tourism management, the participants mostly underscored the importance of the residents. For example, **P4** mentioned:

> *"[...] This is an area [heritage tourism management] that needs to be addressed from multiple perspectives, not just one perspective. Therefore, it's crucial for all stakeholders operating in this field to have a say and contribute resources to this area to act together."*

5.1.1.5. Future-Proofing Heritage

In the qualitative data collection phase, participants were also asked about the strategies and action plans they would recommend for the future development of cultural heritage tourism. In this regard, some of the participants mentioned that capacity readiness is important. Digital guiding tools, cultural heritage literacy, capacity building in tourism education, thematic routes, transnational cultural heritage partnerships, cultural-activity tourism nexus, and favorable investment climate—reflect various sub-themes of capacity readiness in cultural heritage tourism development. Participants emphasized the importance of capacity building in tourism education, and the resulting cultural heritage literacy will play a key role in the development of heritage tourism sites. In this context, **P4** mentioned:

> *"[...] the local people need to embrace the cultural heritage and see it as a tourism value and that they can actually generate income [...]. In this sense, instilling this love and awareness from a young age, and ensuring heritage tourism planning with the local people, is crucial as a starting point."*

Table 58 presents respondents' perceptions of the economic benefits of heritage tourism (n = 130). The highest-rated item is the belief that *local businesses benefit financially from tourism* (M = 4.15), suggesting that heritage tourism is strongly associated with stimulating local economic activity. This is followed by the perception that *tourism revenue is reinvested into community development* (M = 4.01), indicating that participants see heritage tourism as contributing not only to individual businesses but also to broader community well-being. The lowest-rated item, *heritage tourism has created jobs in my community* (M = 3.64), still reflects a moderate level of agreement but suggests that employment benefits may not be as visible or widespread as other economic impacts.

Table 58. Perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism.

Economic benefits	**M**
Local businesses benefit financially from tourism.	4,15
Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development.	4,01
Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community.	3,64

Furthermore, as frequently discussed in case country chapters, international partnerships (e.g., UNESCO, CulturEU), combined with OIC's strong cultural diplomacy, can present an active avenue for both funding and knowledge exchange. Likewise, participants emphasized that establishing transnational cultural heritage partnerships and increasing the number of thematic routes and cultural activities will significantly contribute to the development of heritage tourism. For example, a participant (i.e., **P7**) from Türkiye mentioned: *"[...] There are collaborations with international organizations, such as these information and culture routes. Lobbying efforts are underway to create Türkiye's cultural heritage routes and include them in international routes."* Another participant from Senegal (i.e. **P19**) suggested: *"Develop thematic tourism packages based on local narratives with educational value"*

Therefore, participants were particularly asked to indicate which aspects they considered important for the future of cultural heritage tourism. Participants emphasized cultural diplomacy, identity reflection, reclaiming neglected traditions, cultural currency, and reframing cultural heritage as important characteristics of heritage tourism. Particularly, both reclaiming neglected traditions and reframing cultural heritage were emphasized by some participants as important for the future development of cultural heritage tourism. For example, **P5**: *"[...] What I mean is that we first need to take care of the things we ourselves undervalue or look down upon."* **P16** also noted in relation to reframing cultural heritage: *"Cultural heritage is still viewed as an object, not a subject of development around which a whole system of products, brands and destinations can be developed."*

Table 59 presents respondents' evaluations of funding mechanisms that should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism. The highest-rated mechanisms are public-private partnerships for infrastructure development (M = 4.01) and sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits (M = 4.01). These findings indicate that respondents view collaborative financing models and institutionalized certification schemes with incentives as the most effective approaches for advancing sustainability in heritage tourism. This is followed by heritage conservation grants and tax incentives (M = 3.90), suggesting that while traditional government support remains important, it is perceived as slightly less impactful compared to partnership-based or certification-driven mechanisms. The lowest-rated mechanism is local business investment schemes, such as microloans for artisans (M = 3.87), which implies that although support for local entrepreneurship is valued, it is considered to have a more limited influence on large-scale sustainable tourism financing.

Table 59. Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism?

Funding mechanisms	M
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.	4,01
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.	4,01
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.	3,90
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).	3,87

5.1.2. Cross-tabulation, benchmarking, and thematic analysis

Cross-tabulation was also conducted to examine the relations and differences between the heritage tourism characteristics of OIC case countries. To illustrate the example of Türkiye, participants focus on more structured site management plans, multi-stakeholder engagement, and more story-driven tourism development, wherein governance and marketing priorities were put at the forefront. On the other hand, for Indonesia, the themes were focused on authentic experience for better quality, more community-based tourism development needs, and overtourism risks, quality experience, and sustainable local engagement. Another case country, Senegal, raised the importance of limited infrastructure, the existing need for capacity building in tourism education, and influencer-powered promotion activities, which correspond to the needs of the heritage tourism development in a different heritage tourism site.

Furthermore, benchmarking allowed the comparisons of case OIC countries in this project. For example, as per qualitative and quantitative analysis, Turkish heritage sites reflected effective governance, a diversity of funding sources, and preservation regulations. Indonesia exhibited proper community control and invention such as augmented reality/virtual reality-based experiences, and multi-stakeholder engagement. Lastly, for Senegal, by the willingness of digital promotion, educational interventions and the involvement of strategic influencer marketing efforts, which creates a possibility of employing the best practices featured in other countries.

Thematic analysis revealed recognizing generalizing patterns and recognizing country-specific peculiarities. All three contexts showed that the following are prevalent themes:

Governance and Site Management: Effective site management planning and stakeholder coordination were all highlighted in Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal, citing the necessity of developing capacity.

Tourist Experience and Quality: The empirical analysis indicated the value of story based, memorable and authentic experiences in all three countries.

Marketing and Promotion: Tech-supported strategies consisted of influencer marketing, creation of content for story-driven promotion activities, and marketing worldwide with corporate sponsorships.

Challenges and Risks: The infrastructure constraints, over-tourism and possible commodification were all reported issues and participants were sensitive to changing social norms, and over-commercialization.

Finances and Sustainability: Diversified funding mechanisms, balancing conservation and tourism, and capacity-building initiatives were viewed as essential for long-term sustainability in all of the case countries.

A combination of cross-tabulation, benchmarking and thematic analysis allows a deeper insight into how heritage tourism is engaged in all three countries and indicates both similarities and differences. Such insights will provide insights into specific actions, policy formulation and

knowledge sharing to help improve sustainable and quality tourism designation of heritage sites around the world.

Indonesia demonstrates the strongest performance in the perception of sustainable heritage tourism among Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal. According to the data in Table 60, Indonesia has the highest mean scores across all categories, such as "Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices" M = 4.07). Indonesia also scores highest in areas like "Visitor management policies are effectively implemented" M = 3.59) and "The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism" (M = 3.98). In contrast, Türkiye has the lowest mean scores. Specifically, "Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place" M = 2.51) and "Visitor management policies are effectively implemented" (M = 2.54) are perceived as the weakest areas. Senegal, on the other hand, scores significantly lower than the other two countries in the category of "The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism" (M = 2.44). Overall, the perception of sustainability in Indonesia appears to be stronger than in Türkiye and Senegal.

Based on Table 60, Indonesia demonstrates the strongest performance in the perception of visitor experience among the case countries. According to the data, Indonesia has the highest mean scores across all categories. For example, it scores highest in "Accessibility of heritage sites" with a mean score of M=4.11 and in "Cleanliness and maintenance of sites" with M=4.34. Indonesia also performs best in areas like "Availability of interactive and immersive experiences" (M=4.16) and "Quality of guided tours and interpretation services" (M=3.80). In contrast, the scores for Türkiye and Senegal are significantly lower and are quite close to each other. Türkiye's lowest scores are in "Availability of interactive and immersive experiences" (M=2.98) and "Cleanliness and maintenance of sites" (M=3.05), which are perceived as the weakest areas in terms of visitor experience. Senegal, on the other hand, scores significantly lower than the other two countries in the category of "Availability of interactive and immersive experiences" (M=2.89). Overall, the perception of visitor experience appears to be stronger in Indonesia than in Türkiye and Senegal.

The perception of which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion is examined in Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal. According to the data, Türkiye has the highest mean scores across all the marketing strategies surveyed. For example, it scores highest in "Social media and digital marketing" with a mean score of M=4.35 and in "International tourism fairs and exhibitions" with M=4.14. Türkiye also gives high priority to strategies such as "Influencer and content marketing" (M=4.12) and "Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies" (M=4.05). In contrast, the scores for Indonesia and Senegal are lower than Türkiye's. Although Indonesia's scores are close to Türkiye's, its highest scores are in "International tourism fairs and exhibitions" (M=4.03) and "Social media and digital marketing" (M=4.02). Senegal has the lowest scores in all categories. Specifically, it has the lowest scores in "International tourism fairs and exhibitions" (M=3.11) and "Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media)" (M=3.11). Overall, Türkiye gives the highest priority to modern and digital marketing strategies for heritage tourism promotion, while Indonesia and Senegal also value similar strategies but have a lower perception of their priority compared to Türkiye.

When examining the governance challenges that most impact heritage tourism in Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal, Indonesia has the highest mean scores in all categories. This indicates that participants in Indonesia perceive all the surveyed governance challenges (lack of inter-agency coordination, M=4.54, weak enforcement of regulations, M=4.43, political instability M=4.39, and insufficient community engagement M=4.28) as more significant and impactful compared to the other two countries. In Türkiye, similar issues also receive high scores (political

instability M=4.12, weak enforcement of regulations M=4.04), but they fall behind Indonesia. Senegal has the lowest mean scores in all categories, suggesting that governance challenges are perceived as less impactful compared to the other two countries (e.g., political instability M=3.22). Overall, Indonesia and Türkiye perceive the challenges in heritage tourism governance as more critical than those in Senegal.

Indonesia performs best among Türkiye and Senegal on the perception of funding sources for heritage tourism projects, scoring the highest in six of the seven main categories. The most significant funding sources for Indonesia are perceived to be private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs) (M=4.41) and international donors (M=4.38). In contrast, Türkiye has the highest score only in the category of government grants and subsidies (M=4.23), while its other funding sources fall behind those of Indonesia. Senegal has the lowest mean scores in all categories, indicating that the perception of funding sources for heritage tourism projects is much weaker compared to the other two countries. Overall, Indonesia is perceived to have the most diverse and robust funding sources, while government funding appears to play a dominant role in Türkiye, and Senegal's perception in this regard is the lowest.

When comparing the perception of which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism among Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal, Türkiye and Indonesia are generally perceived to have similar, high priorities. Türkiye scores highest in the categories of "Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits" (M=4.11) and "Local business investment schemes" (M=4.00), while Indonesia leads in "Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development" (M=4.08) and "Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives" (M=4.03). In contrast, Senegal consistently falls behind the other two countries in all categories, although its highest score is in "Local business investment schemes" (M=3.89). Overall, Türkiye and Indonesia have a similar high-priority perception for strengthening funding mechanisms for sustainable heritage tourism, whereas Senegal demonstrates a lower priority perception in this regard.

Based on the table, when comparing the perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism among Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal, Indonesia demonstrates the strongest performance by having the highest scores in two categories. The perception that "Local businesses benefit financially from tourism" (M=4.38) and "Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development" (M=4.43) is notably high in Indonesia. Türkiye, on the other hand, leads only in the "Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community" (M=3.84) category and scores lower than Indonesia in the other two. Senegal has the lowest or an average score in all three categories, indicating that the economic benefits of heritage tourism are perceived as less significant compared to the other two countries. Overall, the perception of the economic benefits of heritage tourism is strongest in Indonesia, particularly concerning local business benefits and community reinvestment.

Based on the table on "What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?", Indonesia has the highest mean scores in all categories except for "Conservation status of heritage sites," where Türkiye has a slightly higher mean score (M=3.96) compared to Indonesia's (M=3.82). This indicates that Indonesian participants perceive all the listed factors as more significant barriers compared to the other two countries. The most critical barriers for Indonesia are perceived to be "Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies" (M=4.44) and "Unequal distribution of tourism benefits" (M=4.33). For Türkiye, the highest-rated barriers are "Limited access to investment and funding" (M=4.11) and "Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards)" (M=4.12). Senegal, on the other hand, consistently has the lowest scores in almost all categories, suggesting that its participants perceive these challenges as less

significant. Overall, the perception of barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism is most critical in Indonesia, which also indicates the awareness of community involvement.

When examining the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism, Indonesia has the highest mean scores in all three categories. This suggests that participants in Indonesia perceive all the listed barriers as more significant and impactful compared to the other two countries. Specifically, "Over-tourism and overcrowding" (M=4.56) and "Weak enforcement of regulations" (M=4.54) are seen as the most critical barriers for Indonesia. Türkiye holds average scores across all categories, with its highest being "Weak enforcement of regulations" (M=3.89). Senegal, in contrast, has the lowest scores in all categories, and perceives "Over-tourism and overcrowding" (M=2.56) as a much less significant barrier than Türkiye or Indonesia. Overall, Indonesia is the country where the barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism are perceived to be most critical, whereas Senegal, as a developing country, has yet to experience over-tourism. The overall mean ratings in each country are reported in Table 60.

Table 60. Comparison of Quantitative Results in Türkiye, Indonesia, and Senegal

	TURKIYE	INDONESIA	SENEGAL
Sustainability of heritage tourism in your country		**M**	
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.	2,68	3,61	3,00
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.	2,54	3,59	2,89
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.	3,19	3,98	2,44
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.	3,07	4,07	3,22
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).	2,51	3,69	2,56
Visitors' experience ratings.		**M**	
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).	3,30	4,11	3,22
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.	3,05	4,34	3,00
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.	3,56	3,80	3,44
Safety and security at heritage sites.	3,33	3,87	3,44
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).	2,98	4,16	2,89
Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?		**M**	
Social media and digital marketing.	4,35	4,02	3,33
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.	4,14	4,03	3,11
Influencer and content marketing.	4,12	3,84	3,33
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.	4,05	3,98	3,44
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).	3,68	3,67	3,11
What governance challenges most impact heritage tourism?		**M**	
Lack of inter-agency coordination.	3,81	4,54	3,67
Weak enforcement of regulations.	4,04	4,43	3,33

Insufficient community engagement.	4,00	4,28	3,44
Political instability.	4,12	4,39	3,22
What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?		**M**	
Government grants and subsidies.	4,23	3,69	3,44
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).	3,68	4,41	3,22
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).	4,04	4,38	3,67
Entrance fees.	3,98	4,11	3,22
Tourism taxes.	3,79	3,93	2,78
Branded Product sales.	3,32	4,34	2,67
Crowdfunding and community contributions.	3,25	4,02	2,89
Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism?		**M**	
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.	3,86	4,03	3,11
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.	4,02	4,08	3,56
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.	4,11	3,97	3,67
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).	4,00	3,80	3,89
Perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism.		**M**	
Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community.	3,84	3,54	3,67
Local businesses benefit financially from tourism.	3,98	4,38	3,78
Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development.	3,63	4,43	3,33
What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?		**M**	
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.	3,60	4,44	3,44
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.	4,04	4,33	3,89
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.	3,79	4,11	3,78
Limited access to investment and funding.	4,11	4,30	4,00
What key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to measure heritage tourism governance?		**M**	
Visitor numbers and tourism revenue.	4,05	4,11	3,67
Conservation status of heritage sites.	3,96	3,82	3,22
Community engagement and local benefits.	3,81	4,26	2,56
Sustainability practices and environmental impact.	3,95	4,15	2,89
Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards).	4,12	4,15	3,44
What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?		**M**	
Lack of funding for conservation.	3,82	4,34	3,67
Weak enforcement of regulations.	3,89	4,54	3,56
Over-tourism and overcrowding.	3,61	4,56	2,56
Climate change and environmental degradation.	3,42	4,59	3,44
Lack of awareness among tourists.	3,58	4,38	3,00

5.1.3. Environmental Analysis & SWOT

The environmental context of sustainable heritage tourism in OIC countries shall be shaped by a delicate balance between conservation and development. With over 231 UNESCO-listed sites and a wealth of intangible traditions, OIC member states collectively hold some of the world's most valuable heritage assets. However, these resources face increasing environmental, social, and economic pressures. Climate change, urbanization, overtourism, and governance issues are among the leading challenges threatening the sustainability of heritage destinations across the Islamic world. Understanding these environmental dynamics is crucial for designing strategies that protect heritage while ensuring that tourism contributes to economic development, cultural preservation, and community well-being.

One of the most pressing challenges for OIC heritage tourism is *climate change*. Rising sea levels, floods, droughts, and extreme weather events are placing historic cities, monuments, and ecosystems at risk. For instance, coastal sites in Egypt and Senegal are threatened by erosion and flooding, while desertification impacts natural heritage across North Africa and the Middle East. Increased wildfires in Türkiye and Indonesia also endanger forests and cultural landscapes. Climate change not only damages tangible heritage such as monuments and archaeological sites, but it also disrupts local cultural practices and livelihoods tied to traditional ecological systems, triggering climate migration. Addressing this requires urgent adaptation strategies, including risk preparedness, disaster management, and climate-resilient site planning.

Overtourism is another environmental pressure undermining the sustainability of OIC heritage destinations. Iconic cities such as Istanbul, Cairo, and Mecca receive millions of visitors annually, often exceeding the carrying capacity of cultural sites. Heavy visitor flows accelerate physical wear on monuments, increase pollution, and diminish the authenticity of cultural experiences. For example, Cappadocia's rock formations and Pamukkale's travertines have been eroded by unregulated mass tourism. Without effective visitor management systems—such as digital ticketing, capacity limits, and zoning—these heritage sites risk irreversible degradation. Managing tourism flows more effectively is becoming essential to preserve both environmental integrity and visitor satisfaction within OIC.

Although heritage tourism generates substantial revenues, many OIC countries struggle with insufficient reinvestment in conservation. Tourism taxes and site entrance fees are often absorbed into general state budgets rather than earmarked for heritage preservation. This leads to chronic *underfunding* of restoration, maintenance, and monitoring activities. The lack of site-based funding models reduces the capacity of local managers to protect and upgrade cultural assets. Innovative financing approaches, such as heritage conservation funds, tourism levies, or public-private partnerships, are needed to secure sustainable financial resources for heritage management. Without dedicated funding, heritage conservation remains vulnerable to neglect, especially in rural and under-visited regions.

The rapid commercialization of cultural heritage in OIC countries has also raised concerns about authenticity. Traditional practices, rituals, and crafts are often commodified to suit tourist expectations, leading to cultural dilution. In cities such as Marrakech and Cairo, *gentrification* has displaced residents from historic quarters, replacing authentic cultural practices with tourist-oriented businesses. This not only undermines the cultural value of heritage but also risks alienating local communities from their own traditions. Sustainable tourism requires

strategies that balance cultural *commodification* with respect for local identity, ensuring that heritage remains a living tradition rather than a staged performance.

Weak *enforcement* of heritage protection laws and fragmented *governance* structures further exacerbate environmental challenges. While most OIC countries have legal frameworks for heritage conservation, implementation is often inconsistent. Overlapping responsibilities between national and local authorities create confusion, while bureaucracy and a lack of monitoring reduce accountability. The absence of coherent governance strategies also limits coordination between tourism authorities, cultural ministries, and local communities. Effective governance models—such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and multi-stakeholder councils—are essential for aligning heritage conservation with tourism development.

Local communities are both custodians and beneficiaries of heritage tourism. *Community involvement* in decision-making and benefit-sharing is crucial for sustainability. Yet in many OIC destinations, communities remain marginalized from heritage tourism governance and receive only limited economic benefits. Unequal distribution of revenues can foster resentment, weaken community support for conservation, and encourage unsustainable practices such as informal tourism services. Empowering communities through participatory governance, training programs, and equitable benefit-sharing models ensures that heritage tourism contributes directly to local well-being while preserving cultural integrity.

Table 61. SWOT Matrix for Sustainable Heritage Tourism in OIC

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
- Rich cultural, natural, and religious heritage assets (231 UNESCO sites in OIC states).	- Uneven infrastructure and service quality across regions.
- Strong intangible heritage (crafts, music, gastronomy, festivals, rituals).	- Weak enforcement of conservation laws and fragmented governance.
- Growing digital outreach and branding strategies (e.g., GoTürkiye).	- Overreliance on mass/coastal tourism, overshadowing heritage tourism.
- Expanding tourism infrastructure in several member states.	- Low reinvestment of tourism revenues into conservation.
- Global recognition of OIC sites through UNESCO listings.	- Commercialization, gentrification, and cultural dilution in urban heritage areas.
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Rising demand for authentic cultural and heritage experiences.	- Climate change impacts (sea-level rise, desertification, extreme weather).
- Development of niche tourism segments (faith-based, gastronomy, rural, crafts).	- Political instability and armed conflicts damaging heritage.
- Adoption of smart technologies (AI, VR/AR, digital archives, e-museums).	- Overtourism and commercialization undermining authenticity.
- Regional cooperation via heritage corridors and cultural diplomacy.	- Urbanization, agriculture, and mining pressures on heritage zones.
- Access to international funds and UNESCO heritage conservation support.	- Unequal distribution of tourism benefits and revenue leakage.

The environmental analysis of heritage tourism in OIC countries highlights a complex interplay of natural risks, social pressures, and governance challenges. Climate change, overtourism, weak funding, and commercialization threaten the sustainability of heritage resources. At the same time, opportunities exist to strengthen governance, mobilize funding, and engage local communities in heritage stewardship. By aligning conservation efforts with economic and social development goals, OIC countries can transform heritage tourism into a resilient and sustainable driver of growth.

To further assess the current position of OIC countries in sustainable heritage tourism, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was conducted. This environmental analysis draws on comparative evidence from case studies such as Türkiye, Egypt, Indonesia, and Senegal, alongside regional assessments. The SWOT helps identify the unique advantages that OIC destinations can leverage, the internal challenges they must overcome, and the external dynamics that shape their long-term prospects.

The greatest *strength* of OIC countries lies in their vast and diverse heritage resources. With over 231 UNESCO World Heritage sites—including the Pyramids of Giza, Göbekli Tepe, Timbuktu, and Borobudur—OIC destinations hold a global competitive edge. Tangible assets such as ancient monuments, archaeological sites, and historic towns are complemented by rich intangible heritage, including crafts, music, gastronomy, and spiritual traditions. Religious and faith-based tourism adds another dimension, with Mecca, Medina, and Al-Quds attracting millions annually. This cultural diversity gives OIC destinations an inherent advantage in catering to different tourist motivations. Additionally, growing digital outreach platforms and national branding strategies, such as Türkiye's GoTürkiye initiative, have enhanced global visibility of heritage destinations.

Despite their rich heritage, OIC countries face internal *weaknesses* that limit their competitiveness. Infrastructure and service quality vary widely, with rural and peripheral regions lacking adequate facilities. Governance and regulation remain weak, with poor enforcement of heritage protection laws and fragmented institutional responsibilities. Many destinations rely heavily on mass or coastal tourism, overlooking heritage tourism's potential. Funding gaps also remain a critical weakness, as revenues from tourism are not systematically reinvested into conservation. Furthermore, commercialization and gentrification have led to cultural dilution in urban centers, undermining authenticity. These weaknesses reduce the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of OIC heritage destinations.

OIC countries have significant *opportunities* to position themselves as leaders in sustainable heritage tourism. The global rise in demand for authentic, cultural, and experience-based travel offers a favorable market environment for the diverse heritage of OIC. Niche segments such as gastronomy, craft-based tourism, faith routes, and rural heritage experiences can diversify offerings and distribute tourism benefits more equitably. The adoption of smart technologies—such as AI visitor management, VR/AR experiences, satellite technologies, and digital archives—can enhance site management and visitor engagement. Regional cooperation also presents opportunities, particularly through multi-country heritage corridors that highlight thematic heritage such as Islamic history and culture. Access to international funding, including UNESCO grants and cultural funds, further supports the potential for heritage tourism development. By aligning with global sustainability trends, OIC destinations can enhance competitiveness while preserving cultural integrity.

At the same time, OIC faces external *threats* that may undermine progress in the development of sustainable heritage tourism. Climate change remains the most significant, with coastal sites

at risk from sea-level rise and desertification affecting natural landscapes. Overtourism and commercial exploitation threaten to erode the authenticity and cultural value of heritage destinations, leading to long-term degradation. Urbanization and industrial pressures, including mining and agriculture, further endanger cultural landscapes. Additionally, unequal benefit distribution and high leakage of revenues to foreign operators may cause social tensions and reduce community support for tourism.

The SWOT analysis reveals that while OIC countries hold unparalleled strengths in their cultural and natural heritage, internal weaknesses and external threats continue to constrain the sustainable development of heritage tourism. However, by capitalizing on opportunities such as niche market diversification, smart technologies, and regional cooperation, OIC destinations can mitigate threats and transform weaknesses into strengths. Ultimately, sustainable heritage tourism in the OIC requires coordinated governance, reinvestment in conservation, and equitable community participation. With the right policies and collaborative strategies, OIC members can position themselves as global leaders in heritage tourism while preserving their unique cultural legacies for future generations. These strategies, along with the road map and key performance indicators, are discussed in the next section.

5.2. Roadmap for Sustainable Heritage Tourism & Recommendations for OIC Countries

Heritage tourism in the OIC region holds immense promise, but this potential can only be realized if governments, communities, and private actors adopt a coherent, forward-looking roadmap. This section presents such a roadmap by integrating insights from the case countries, international benchmarks, and both qualitative and quantitative findings. The recommendations are presented in two tiers: minimum standards, which represent the foundational requirements for sustainable heritage tourism, and good practices, which elevate destinations to global competitiveness. The subheadings in this chapter organize the policy pillars, but within each, detailed recommendations are elaborated in full paragraphs, ensuring that strategies are clear, justified, and supported with examples from case countries.

5.2.1. Minimum Standards – Foundational Requirements

These represent the essential pillars every OIC member state should implement to ensure that heritage tourism is managed sustainably and inclusively:

a. Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

Establishing a strong legal and regulatory framework is the first step. Governments must adopt or update comprehensive heritage protection legislation covering both tangible and intangible assets, aligned with UNESCO conventions. Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (EIA/SIA) should be mandated for all tourism infrastructure projects in or near heritage sites to safeguard against long-term risks. Enforceable visitor management regulations, including capacity limits and zoning restrictions, should also be introduced. Independent heritage management bodies must be created, with clear authority over policy implementation, enforcement, and funding allocation. Case studies such as Türkiye's Tourism Strategy 2023 and Egypt's post-2011 reforms in Cairo show how strengthened legislation improves heritage protection.

b. Heritage Site Conservation and Maintenance

Preserving heritage sites requires identifying carrying capacities and investing in infrastructure to handle them sustainably. Governments should create standardized monitoring, inspection, and maintenance schedules for cultural sites, supported with adequate budget allocations. Risk preparedness plans addressing climate change, natural disasters, and human-induced threats are crucial. Senegal's Gorée Island highlights the importance of continuous maintenance, while Indonesia's Borobudur demonstrates how strict visitor controls, regular inspection, and disaster risk protocols preserve sites under immense tourism pressure. Importantly, conservation efforts must include intangible heritage practices such as oral traditions, craftsmanship, and performing arts, ensuring they are documented, safeguarded, and integrated into tourism offerings.

c. Governance and Institutional Coordination

Clear governance structures are critical. OIC countries should designate national heritage councils or equivalent leadership bodies with authority to coordinate ministries, local governments, communities, and private stakeholders. Community consultation and participation must be institutionalized within tourism planning, ensuring that residents are included as decision-makers. Senegal's municipal heritage councils in Saint-Louis illustrate how decentralization can create responsive and locally grounded governance.

d. Community Empowerment, Involvement and Benefit-Sharing

Heritage tourism cannot succeed without communities. Governments must ensure equitable distribution of tourism revenues to local communities, particularly those serving as custodians of heritage. Employment opportunities should be facilitated through local hiring quotas, while entrepreneurship can be supported with subsidies and training for artisans, guides, and SMEs. Awareness and capacity-building programs will enhance local ownership of heritage, as demonstrated in Indonesia's cultural village programs, where residents act as custodians of living traditions while benefiting economically. Empowerment must extend beyond built heritage, recognizing communities as guardians of intangible heritage—festivals, rituals, and culinary traditions—that form the living fabric of OIC cultures.

e. Basic Visitor Infrastructure and Services

Accessible and safe visitor infrastructure is a minimum requirement. This includes clean facilities, signage, rest areas, and transport connections. Services should also include multilingual interpretation, digital resources, and inclusive access for persons with disabilities. Egypt's investments in visitor centers at Luxor and the Grand Egyptian Museum exemplify the importance of modern infrastructure in improving visitor experience, while Italy's Venice shows how infrastructure regulation, including timed entry, can protect fragile heritage.

5.2.2. Good Practices – Excellence and Competitiveness

Destinations that have achieved minimum standards should adopt advanced measures to enhance visitor experience, improve governance, and strengthen market positioning:

a. Integrated Destination Management Plans (DMPs)

Heritage tourism should be integrated into broader urban and regional strategies. Advanced DMPs should include smart heritage management systems such as AI-based monitoring, immersive VR/AR interpretation, e-museums, and digital ticketing platforms. Türkiye's

thematic tourism corridors and Egypt's plans to integrate secondary heritage sites show how DMPs can balance growth and sustainability.

b. Diversification of Heritage Tourism Products

Product diversification broadens market appeal. Destinations should create thematic heritage tours such as faith tourism circuits, gastronomy trails, and craft villages. Intangible heritage—including festivals, performing arts, oral traditions, and culinary practices—must be promoted alongside built heritage. Türkiye's emerging culinary identity and Indonesia's cultural villages illustrate the power of intangible cultural heritage in tourism, while Senegal's music and dance traditions at Gorée and Saint-Louis show how festivals can attract international attention. Italy's "slow tourism" itineraries in Agri-tourism establishments highlight how blending local crafts, foodways, and traditions with built heritage creates a holistic visitor experience involving communities in a sustainable way

c. Sustainable Marketing and Branding

Marketing and branding must be rooted in authenticity. Destinations should leverage both digital platforms and traditional media to tell authentic stories. Targeted strategies should focus on niche segments such as cultural tourists, slow tourism enthusiasts, educational academic tours, faith tourists, creative tourists, culinary tourists, and heritage volunteers. Türkiye's "Go Türkiye" campaign demonstrates how digital channels can be used to encourage dispersal and shape destination image.

d. Sustainable Self-Funding Mechanisms

Financing must move beyond reliance on state budgets. Heritage conservation funds, supported by tourism levies, private sponsorship, and international grants, can create sustainable revenue streams. Public–private partnerships (PPPs) should be encouraged for the restoration and adaptive reuse of heritage assets. Senegal's PPP initiatives and Türkiye's adaptive reuse of caravanserais into boutique hotels provides proven models. Innovative funding should also support intangible heritage projects such as community-run festivals or apprenticeships for traditional crafts.

e. Regional Cooperation among OIC States

Finally, cooperation across OIC member states can amplify global impact. An OIC Heritage Tourism Alliance could coordinate joint marketing, capacity-building, and knowledge exchange. Multi-country heritage routes—such as a trans-Saharan cultural corridor linking Morocco, Mali, and Senegal, or faith-based routes connecting Türkiye, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—would position OIC destinations as global heritage hubs. Establishing a digital platform to register, manage, and showcase both tangible and intangible cultural heritage across OIC member states could serve as a central hub for storytelling, virtual exhibitions, and collaborative promotion of shared heritage assets.

5.3. Implementation Roadmap

Table 62. Implementation Roadmap: Phased Strategy and Expected Outcomes

Phase	Timeline	Key Actions	Lead Stakeholders	Expected Outcomes
Phase 1: Foundation	Years 1–2	Adopt legal frameworks, establish governance structures, secure funding, initiate training	National Tourism & Culture Ministries, Local Authorities	Legal protection, coordinated governance, skilled workforce
Phase 2: Consolidation	Years 3–4	Implement conservation plans, upgrade visitor services, launch targeted marketing	Site Management Bodies, Private Sector	Improved site conditions, better visitor satisfaction
Phase 3: Innovation & Growth	Years 5+	Introduce advanced technologies, expand product diversity, scale cross-border cooperation	OIC Alliance, Regional DMOs	Increased competitiveness, sustainable growth, stronger brand recognition

In summary, sustainable heritage tourism in OIC countries requires a dual approach: ensuring minimum standards to protect and manage heritage resources responsibly for heritage destinations at an early stage of their introduction and adopting good practices that elevate existing heritage destinations to established status. By combining legal protection, community engagement, innovative funding, and creative marketing, OIC member states can secure heritage assets for future generations while leveraging them for inclusive and sustainable economic development. However, continuous monitoring is also required to track progress. And guide corrective actions when needed. Here is a list of KPIs heritage destinations should continuously monitor and act upon:

Table 63. Suggested Key Performance Indicators

Dimension	Indicator Examples
Sustainability & Conservation	% sites with conservation plans; condition index scores; incidents per 100,000 visitors; % sites with Risk and Crises management plans.
Visitor Experience	Visitor satisfaction scores; average time; % visits in off-peak seasons; % sites meeting accessibility standards.
Community Benefits	Share of local employment; number of MSMEs supported; % enterprises led by women/youth; community satisfaction indices, number of apprenticeships for traditional crafts.
Governance & Finance	Conservation fund capitalization; share of revenues reinvested; functionality of DMOs.

The roadmap outlined in this chapter underscores that heritage tourism in OIC countries cannot succeed through fragmented efforts or short-term fixes. Building on case country insights, adopting both minimum standards and good practices, and implementing phased, evidence-based policies will allow member states to position heritage tourism as a driver of cultural preservation, economic growth, and social inclusion. By integrating tools such as visitor

management, participatory governance, and digital innovation, OIC states can ensure that heritage tourism contributes not only to immediate recovery but also to long-term resilience and global competitiveness. Importantly, this roadmap stresses the equal importance of intangible heritage—songs, crafts, cuisine, rituals, and festivals—so often neglected in tourism strategies but essential to sustaining the living identities of OIC nations. This roadmap is both a policy blueprint and a practical guide for governments to transform heritage tourism into a sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive sector.

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Appendices

Appendice A: Draft Interview

We appreciate your time and willingness to take part in this interview on heritage tourism. The interview is expected to take approximately 40 minutes.
The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of heritage tourism management in OIC countries. Around 20 participants from various stakeholder groups will be involved in this study.
Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without providing a reason.
All information collected will be used solely for research purposes. Your responses will remain confidential, and your personal details will be anonymized. No individual participant will be identified directly or indirectly in any reports or third-party communications.
If you have any questions—either now or at a later stage—please feel free to contact the researcher at gurelc@istanbul.edu.tr or call +90 212 4401540.

A. Demographic Information

1. Gender:

☐ Please specify ……

2. Age:

☐ Please specify ……

3. Level of Education:

☐ Please specify ……..

4. What is your current position?

☐ Please specify ……..

5. Years of Tourism Experience

☐ Please specify ……

B. Open-ended Questions

1. What are the characteristics of successful heritage tourism destinations, services and products? How are these identified?
2. What are the heritage resources and their place in tourism system in your country?
3. How were heritage sites identified and developed for tourism purposes? Who were the key stakeholders involved in the formation process, and what roles did they play?
4. What are the structures and processes related to heritage destination governance and stakeholder involvement? What key performance indicators are utilized?
5. Which policies, strategies, legal, administrative and financial frameworks are being used to sustain and enhance the quality of heritage resources?
6. What types of funding sources (e.g. entrance fees, tourist tax, donations, public, private, international organizations) are used for heritage tourism projects?
7. What marketing activities and communication channels are used to brand, position and promote heritage tourism destinations? What activities (e.g., storytelling, guided tours, interactive activities) are organized to enhance the visitor experience at heritage tourism destinations?
8. What environmental (e.g. carrying capacity), social (e.g. gentrification), and economic measures (e.g. inflation) can be taken to ensure the sustainability of heritage tourism resources?
9. What are the biggest challenges faced in the field of heritage tourism? What solutions or recommendations do you propose to overcome these challenges? What strategies and action plans do you suggest for the future development of heritage tourism?

Appendice B. Draft Survey

Dear participant,

This survey aims to assess stakeholders' perspectives about heritage tourism in OIC countries. The questionnaire consists of five sections:
Section 1: Demographic Information
Section 2: General Information (For All Respondents)
Section 3: Sustainability of Heritage Tourism (Using GSTC & SUS-TAS Scales)
Section 4: Visitor Experience and Marketing (Using SERVQUAL Model & Heritage Experience Scale-HES)
Section 5: Governance, Policy, and Funding Mechanisms (Using WGI & Tourism Governance Scorecard- TGS)
The study is for academic purposes, and your answers will be kept strictly confidential
If you come across any unfamiliar terms, simply click on the word to view its definition and meaning.
Thank you for your participation!
URL:
Email:

GDPR Compliance Statement:
I have been provided with information regarding the purpose and content of the study in question. Subsequent to receiving this information, I was invited to participate as a respondent. Upon agreeing to participate in this study, I have been assured that my identity will be kept confidential both during the conduct of the research and upon publication.
I consent to the use of my data for the purposes outlined in the study. I have been adequately assured that my personal information will be carefully protected during the use of research results for educational and scientific purposes.
I have been informed that my data will be stored securely for [32 months] following the completion of the study and that it will not be shared with any third parties without my explicit consent. I retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. I also understand that I have the right to access, correct, or request the deletion of my personal data at any time by contacting Prof. Dr. Gurel CETIN at **gurelc@istanbul.edu.tr**
I do not incur any financial liability related to expenses associated with the research, and I acknowledge that no payment will be made to me. I affirm that I have fully understood all the explanations provided to me regarding the research. I am participating in this study of my own free will, without any coercion. Upon request, a digital copy of the completed form I have responded to will be shared with me.
For any questions or concerns regarding your personal data, please contact Prof. Dr. Gurel CETIN at gurelc@istanbul.edu.tr

☐ Approved

Demographic Information

1. Gender:

- Please specify ……

2. Age:

- Please specify ……

3. Level of Education:

- Please specify ……..

4. What is your current position?

- Please specify ……..

5. Years of Tourism Experience

- Please specify ……

General Information (For All Respondents)

Which OIC country are you from?

Please specify ……

Sustainability of Heritage Tourism (Using GSTC & SUS-TAS Scales)

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) and the Sustainable Tourism Attitude Scale (SUS-TAS) will be used to assess sustainability perceptions.

Sustainability of heritage tourism in your country (GSTC-based rating scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5
Heritage sites are well-preserved and protected against environmental and human threats.					
Visitor management policies (e.g., carrying capacity limits, waste management) are effectively implemented.					
The local community benefits economically from heritage tourism.					
Heritage tourism policies promote environmental conservation and sustainable practices.					
Heritage sites have climate adaptation strategies in place (e.g., flood protection, fire prevention).					
What are the biggest barriers to sustainability in heritage tourism?	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of funding for conservation.					
Weak enforcement of regulations.					

Over-tourism and overcrowding.					
Climate change and environmental degradation.					
Lack of awareness among tourists.					
Visitor Experience and Marketing (Using SERVQUAL Model & Heritage Experience Scale - HES) The SERVQUAL Model measures service quality, while the Heritage Experience Scale (HES) evaluates emotional and cultural engagement with heritage tourism sites. Visitors' experience ratings (SERVQUAL-based scale, 1 = Very Poor, 5 = Excellent)					
	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility of heritage sites (transportation, signage, infrastructure).					
Cleanliness and maintenance of sites.					
Quality of guided tours and interpretation services.					
Safety and security at heritage sites.					
Availability of interactive and immersive experiences (e.g., storytelling, VR tours).					
Which marketing strategies should be prioritized for heritage tourism promotion?	1	2	3	4	5
Social media and digital marketing.					
International tourism fairs and exhibitions.					
Influencer and content marketing.					
Partnerships with airlines and travel agencies.					
Traditional advertising (TV, radio, print media).					
What governance challenges most impact heritage tourism?	1	2	3	4	5
Lack of inter-agency coordination.					
Weak enforcement of regulations.					
Insufficient community engagement.					
Political instability.					
What are the primary sources of funding for heritage tourism projects?	1	2	3	4	5

Government grants and subsidies.					
Private sector investments (Public-Private Partnerships - PPPs).					
International donors (e.g., UNESCO, World Bank).					
Entrance fees.					
Tourism taxes.					
Brande Product sales.					
Crowdfunding and community contributions.					
Which funding mechanisms should be strengthened for sustainable heritage tourism? (Rank from 1 = Least Important to 5 = Most Important).					
	1	2	3	4	5
Heritage conservation grants and tax incentives.					
Public-private partnerships for infrastructure development.					
Sustainable tourism certification programs with financial benefits.					
Local business investment schemes (e.g., microloans for artisans).					
Perceived economic benefits of heritage tourism (TIPS-based scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).					
	1	2	3	4	5
Heritage tourism has created jobs in my community.					
Local businesses benefit financially from tourism.					
Tourism revenue is reinvested into community development.					
What are the key barriers to economic sustainability in heritage tourism?					
	1	2	3	4	5
Leakage of tourism revenues to foreign companies.					
Unequal distribution of tourism benefits.					
Seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.					
Limited access to investment and funding.					
What key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to measure heritage tourism governance? (Rank from 1 = Least Important to 5 = Most Important)					
	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor numbers and tourism revenue.					
Conservation status of heritage sites.					

Community engagement and local benefits.					
Sustainability practices and environmental impact.					
Global recognition (e.g., UNESCO listings, awards).					

Appendix C. Participants' Profile

No	Country	Gender	Age	Marital	Education	Year of Experience	Profession
P1	Türkiye	Male	42	Married	Bachelor	27+	Academician
P2	Türkiye	Male	47	Married	Bachelor	11+	HR Expert
P3	Türkiye	Male	54	Married	Bachelor	4+	Tourism Expert
P4	Türkiye	Female	39	Single	PhD	5+	Governmental Tourism Agency
P5	Türkiye	Male	57	Married	PhD	10+	Tourism Expert
P6	Türkiye	Male	48	Married	Bachelor	22+	Head of Tour Guides Association
P7	Türkiye	Male	68	Married	Bachelor	40+	N/A
P8	Türkiye	Male	57	Married	Bachelor	35+	Tour Guide
P9	Türkiye	Male	37	Married	PhD	17+	Executive of the Chefs' Federation
P10	Indonesia	Male	42	Married	PhD	27+	Tour Guide
P11	Indonesia	Female	33	Married	Bachelor	5+	Tourism Expert
P12	Indonesia	Female	48	Married	Master Degree	27+	Tourism Officer
P13	Indonesia	Male	46	Married	PhD	26+	Tourism Academician
P14	Indonesia	Female	42	Married	PhD	15+	Head of Association
P15	Indonesia	Male	42	Married	PhD	10+	Lecturer
P16	Indonesia	Female	54	Married	Master's degree	27+	Conservation Officer
P17	Indonesia	Male	27	Single	Bachelor	2+	Tour guide
P18	Senegal	Male	58	Married	PhD	25+	Tourism Academician
P19	Senegal	Male	34	Married	Bachelor	25+	Guide
P20	Senegal	Male	54	Married	Masters Degree	25+	Tourism Academician

Appendix D. Selective Coding

Construct	# of coding for each theme	# of interviews with each theme
Service Performance		
Site Management Plans	**11**	**7**
Accessibility	**11**	**9**
Tourism Business Infrastructure	**3**	**3**
Demand Analysis	**2**	**2**
AI-Driven Transformation	**3**	**2**
KPI-Based Heritage Governance	**1**	**1**
National-Level Governance and Policy Support	**7**	**6**
Quality-Shaping Heritage Experiences	**8**	**7**
Marketing		
Experiential Marketing	**7**	**7**
Place-Based Tourism Innovation	**3**	**3**
Tour Guide Accountability	**2**	**2**
Digital Global Promotion	**9**	**9**
Content Creation for Promotion	**2**	**2**
Story-Driven Tourism Promotion	**13**	**8**
Influencer-Powered Promotion	**7**	**5**
Expert-Guided Experience	**3**	**3**
Positioning	**2**	**2**
Tech-Enhanced Heritage via AR/VR	**1**	**1**
Islamic Heritage as Driver	**2**	**1**
Managerial Challenges		
Heritage Perception		
Tangible Heritage Focus	**4**	**3**
Divergent Heritage Perspectives	**2**	**1**
Embodied Heritage	**1**	**1**
Hidden Underwater Heritage	**2**	**2**
Lack of Regional Brand Identity	**2**	**2**
Less Public Awareness	**4**	**4**
Less Host-Guest Engagement	**2**	**2**
Governance		
Emerging Governance Needs	**4**	**3**
Infrastructure Limitations	**3**	**2**
Segmentation Limits	**6**	**4**
Urbanization		
Gentrification	**2**	**2**
Commodification	**1**	**1**
Financing and Funding		
Lack of Funding for Conservation	**2**	**2**
Lack of Revenue Mechanisms	**1**	**1**
Investment Challenges	**1**	**1**
Diversified Heritage Finance	**5**	**4**

Governmental Funds	**3**	**3**
Funding Autonomy	**2**	**2**
Challenges in Site-Based Funding	**3**	**1**
Corporate Sponsorships	**8**	**8**
Tourist Tax	**3**	**3**
Entrance Fees	**8**	**7**
Donations	**4**	**4**
Sustainable Balance		
Threats		
Overtourism Risks	**9**	**9**
Heritage Hijack	**2**	**2**
Vandalism	**1**	**1**
Less Community Engagement	**2**	**2**
Lack of Regeneration	**2**	**2**
Over-commercialization	**4**	**4**
Changing Social Norms	**2**	**2**
Value co-destruction	**3**	**3**
Investment Risk Perception	**1**	**1**
Climate Change	**1**	**1**
Natural Disasters	**3**	**2**
Measures		
Balancing Tourism & Conservation	**8**	**4**
Preservation	**3**	**3**
Sustainability Impact Calculator	**1**	**1**
Protective Penalties	**2**	**1**
Community-Based Tourism	**16**	**12**
Multi-Stakeholder Engagement	**19**	**14**
Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion	**4**	**4**
Supporting Local MSMEs	**1**	**1**
Future-Proofing Heritage		
Capacity Readiness		
Digital Guiding Tools	**1**	**1**
Cultural Heritage Literacy	**7**	**3**
Capacity Building in Tourism Education	**10**	**8**
Thematic Tourism Routes	**6**	**6**
Transnational Cultural Heritage Partnerships	**5**	**4**
Cultural-Activity Tourism Nexus	**2**	**2**
Favorable Investment Climate	**1**	**1**
Heritage as Soft Power		
Cultural Diplomacy	**1**	**1**
Identity Reflection	**2**	**2**
Reclaiming Neglected Traditions	**1**	**1**
Cultural Currency	**2**	**2**
Reframing Cultural Heritage	**1**	**1**