Safar- An Affordable Tourist Guide To Solving All Tourism-Related Issues In Oman

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the fast-growing and highly popular industries in Oman. Millions of people from all around the world visit Oman every year to witness its natural landscapes and rich cultural heritage. It is one of the highly profitable industries and thus, is not just limited to sightseeing and exploring various places. It also contributes to local businesses like hotels, guest houses, family-run restaurants, handcrafts and many more. Tourism has grown far beyond its field and influenced the activities of small and medium-sized businesses that are associated with it. This has allowed local people to better showcase Omani culture to the outside world. In order for these local businesses to flourish alongside the tourism industry, there is much-needed support and effort required. One such effort can be made by promoting local businesses using online platforms like web applications and social media. This is where our website called Safar comes into the picture. As being a web application developed for tourism purposes that provides all the necessary services that a tourist requires and can look for in any application. The application highly focuses on supporting local businesses and promoting them to tourists so that they can experience the authentic Omani culture and feel the rich heritage of the land. This research used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The primary data was collected using interviews and questionnaires. The secondary data were collected from articles and online papers. Thus, the paper focuses on how web applications like Safar can be used for improving the quality of services and promoting local Omani businesses in the Oman Tourism sector.

Introduction

Safar is an Arabic word that means travel. Safar means travel in Hindi, Bangla, and Urdu as well. The name of the business indicates that the business is focused on the travelling sector. The company is a service provider. Safar intends to let individuals explore every corner of Oman with a fun and stress-free experience. The business aims to provide all the details a traveller looks for in one app. Assistance for nearby accommodation, including meals in the packages are some of the benefits the clients of Safar can experience. The tagline of the company says "Safar, Anywhere, Anytime", which means the users can travel anywhere and anytime. The company is a service provider in the travel and tourism industry. It is a Limited Liability Company (LLC). These will be discussed in the further sections in detail.

The travel and tourism sector no longer qualifies as a tertiary or secondary revenue source for countries. In the era of efficient mobility and globalization, the tourism industry has emerged being one of the most important strategies to increase the living standards in many places. According to Research at SQU (2022), the tourist industry worldwide alone generated 9 trillion US dollars of revenue in 2019 which is thrice more than the agricultural sector of the same year. This amount was spent by 1.5 billion tourists from all around the globe. The Sultanate of Oman accounted for the majority of the 3.5 million visits from the MENA region i.e., Middle East and North Africa.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This research aims to investigate tourism in Oman and implement the findings to develop a web application solving tourism-related issues and also focusing on supporting local businesses across Oman.

- ► To investigate tourism culture across Oman.
- ► To assist tourists to navigate around Oman by supplying them with all necessary services in one place.
- ► To promote the use of tourism websites in support of local businesses.
- ► To promote knowledge about Oman's natural beauty and showcase its cultural richness to the world.
- ► To propose the development of a web application that offers high-quality services at much more affordable prices around Oman.

Methodology

The research approaches that this paper followed were research approaches qualitative and quantitative. The primary data was collected using interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaire was collected from 41 people who provide great insight into their interests and options for the application development. On the other hand, 5 people were interviewed to collect their knowledge and opinion about the topic. This data was collected from both Omani and Non-Omani. The secondary data were collected from articles and online papers.

Literature Review

Tourism in Oman

Oman is a country filled with natural beauty and tourist places. The tourism industry in Oman is a quickly expanding and evolving one which has led to an increase in its economy and GDP. The country has high potential due to its rich cultural and historically valuable places which can attract people to the Gulf region (Busaidi et al, 2019). When considering natural-based tourism, Oman has offer sunny deserts, snow-filled mountains, blue ocean, turtle beaches and high-altitude lands. These things mark Oman at the top list for tourists and thus, leading to an increase in tourism. The government of Oman is also contributing to the efforting to improve the tourism industry in Oman by constructing tourist places and other attractions. Currently, the government of Oman has invested around R.O. 2.290 bn for 396 projects that are to be constructed all over the Sultanate (Refinity, 2023).

Sustainability in Tourism

Tourism is an ever-growing industry, expanding from the highlands of America to hot deserts in Sahara. People all over the world visit a country for its various enrichments. Some for medicine, nature, technology and culture. Though tourism and the reason to visit may vary from person to person, the need for sustainable tourism exists in all sectors. Several ways in which sustainable tourism can be practised are by spreading awareness about the importance and need for sustainability (Plain Concepts, 2022). Green tourism is an emerging concept where people reduce the impact on the environment by declining the use of plastic and switching to eco-friendly methods. Use of public transport instead of individual vehicles, choosing natural products over chemical or artificial ones and supporting small and local businesses. All these sums up the small contributions that tourists can do. On the other hand, government and officials must work towards building smart cities, promoting technological usage, constructing more tourist places and supporting tourists with special facilities. This will not just help in sustaining tourism but also attract them to visit and explore new spaces (Simon, 2023).

Challenges and Solutions to Tourism

The impact of covid pandemic and post-pandemic recovery has affected the tourism industry greatly, leading to a decrease in GDP, economic growth, unemployability and stress among people. In many countries, tourism plays a vital role in economic growth and stability. Thus, sustaining, improving and supporting the industry becomes their priority. Taxation, government and cross-border regulation, security and lack of infrastructure are some of the common challenges faced by tourists (technofunk, 2023). Hence, many countries like Oman are trying to implement innovative solutions and ways to attract tourists to the country (Oukil et al, 2016). Some of these efforts include the construction of better and improved infrastructure, enhanced safety and security of the people, the building of tourist places to visit, and the promotion of green tourism and tourist-friendly applications (Henderson, 2015).

Smart Tourism

According to statistics by Statista (2023), the tourism industry raised about US$471.30m in revenue so far in the year 2023 which is an increase of 30% from last year alone. With the emergence of new technologies and innovative ways to sustain life, there are so many upgrades that can be seen in the field of tourism. Some of this could be access to better quality internet on streets, accurate weather predictions of travel, enhanced route mapping in different terrain, language application and many more. All of these features highly depend on four key IT technologies: IOT, mobile communication, cloud computing and AI applications. Combinations of these features not only help the tourist in guiding them through the country but also improve their time spent. Some applications and websites show places with high popularity and creative spaces which are recommended to visit. Fast internet with a voice assistant to guide you can help many tourists who want to visit foreign countries. This makes their journey more memorable and time-worthy (Plain Concepts, 2022).

Results

Interview Results

For this paper, 5 people were interviewed who usually visit different places in Oman and are tourists themselves. The following are the type of questions that we asked:

1. What's your challenge during tripping?
2. Do you think by utilizing Safar you will have a better trip experience?
3. How much do you know about Oman's tourist places?
4. Is it essential to know about the history of the place, the level of difficulties to trip and other information?

The overall response was very positive and helped us to better understand the difficulties and challenges that they were facing and the thing they wish an application/ website like Safar can provide. The major issue they faced during any trip was related to lack of accurate location, language barrier, transportation and food availability. The trips that they had with local people were the only ones which were satisfying and less stressful to locate. Most of the time they have to be dependent on someone to guide them to the location and manage the food and transportation. Thus, having an application like Safar will be very useful for people and tourists like them. According to the interviewee, Oman is full of natural and historic places to visit but requires proper knowledge and guidance to locate them. Having a locally supported application will not only help the tourist but also better promote the places and culture of the people

in the place. They believe it is vital to know about the history and geography of the place before you visit it. This helps with planning the trip, managing time and accommodating people.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire was responded by 41 respondents majority ranging from the age 18-41 having the gender of women (29%) and men (66%). The nationality and resident status of the respondents were also collected. The majority of respondents were non-Omani (83%) while the rest belonged to Omani nationality. About 41% of the respondents were residents of Oman while the rest were non-residence(24%) and others(34%).

The questionnaire results showed that many of the respondents think that Oman is a tourist country and that supporting local businesses in Oman is also very important as supported by 83% of the respondents. It was observed in the result that many of the respondents prefer to trip about 1-3 times a month while the rest 17% would like to trip 4 and more times. All the respondents gave a position response about the use of an application like Safar as they were facing diverse challenges like lack of destination, transport, poor knowledge about the places and concerns related to food. They also would like to be able to see pictures and know about the places and their historical significance before visiting the place. Being a resident of Oman many believe that they cannot easily locate good natural places to spend their weekends. This was agreed by about 44% of the respondents. On the other hand, 20 % strongly agreed, 24% selected neutral and 12% disagreed.

Thus, it can be conducted that, it was revealed that there were several issues faced by residents and tourists of Oman who wanted to travel around the country but couldn't find a suitable application that could guide them on it. Thus, the proposed application, Safar, could solve some, if not, then all of these problems. Starting from guiding the tourist to various destinations, providing restaurants, and hotels, and providing more opportunities for connecting with the local people and the culture of Oman.
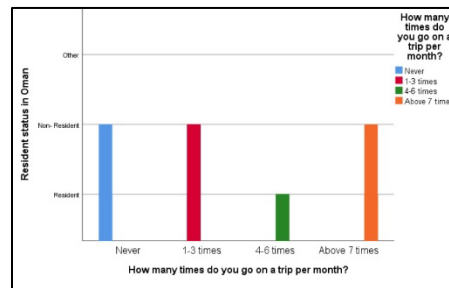

Figure 1. Compares resident status and the number of trips taken by them
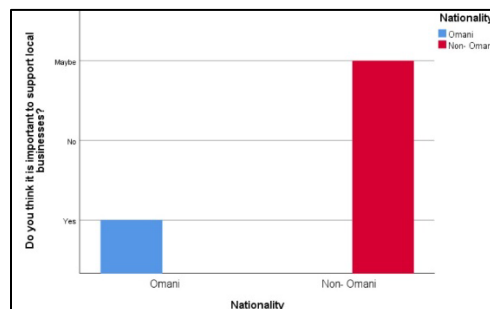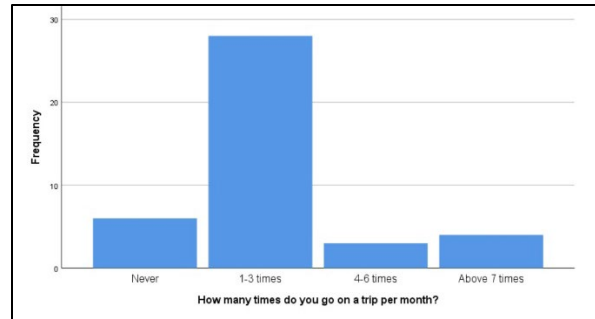

Figure 2. Comparing the importance of supporting local businesses and nationality

Figure 3. Frequency of tripping per month

Discussion

After conducting interviews and questionnaires, and doing article and website research, the researchers gained much-needed knowledge about the overall tourism industry with its challenges and possible solutions in Oman. Though the degree of challenges varies from person to person, the application can provide a centralized solution for all. This may be related to location, language assistance, food, accommodation, guidance about historic importance or wildlife tours.

Conclusion

The application will aid any person wishing to visit various places in Oman as per their interest and budget. It will help them to experience the culture and natural beauty of Oman in a better form. The application will boost the tourism industry in Oman and help in promoting local businesses, thus contributing to Oman Vision 2040. Thus, promoting a green and sustainable tourism industry in the country support the small and local business as well as the portraits culture of Oman.

Recommendations

- Tourism is one of the main non-oil revenue generators for Oman and can increase Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as more the number of people visit Oman, they are highly likely to understand the current status of Oman and may start businesses here.
- This study can support any tourism consultancy companies

Limitation

Though there were many potential benefits and facilities that 'Safar' can provide to the public and tourist community, still there exist some limitations to functionalities. Some of these limitations may include :
- Public interest: tourism is a vast industry when considering Gulf countries. Thus, portraying our services as a unique and innovative facility to the people will be challenging, and will require a good amount of marketing and awareness among the masses.
- Demand for quality: promoting local businesses and products to non-native people is the main aim of our service. At times these local services and products might not be of high quality as they involve the use of locally found ingredients and traditional methods of preparations. Thus, the researcher needs innovative ways to better promote them.

Acknowledgments

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