

Destination Management: Male Maldives

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1. Abstraction

The development and sustainable growth of the tourism sector are significantly influenced by power dynamics and political factors. The Maldives' policy of promoting quality in luxury tourism has been accompanied by environmental degradation, human rights violations, and economic inequalities. The acknowledgment of the state's role and the balancing of competing interests are imperative considerations in sustainable tourism research.

The present study conducts a critical evaluation of the degree to which the principles of sustainable tourism are incorporated in the development management plan of Male, which is the capital city of the Maldives. This report endeavours to conduct a thorough analysis of the sustainable tourism practises in Male by scrutinising the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental pillars of sustainability. Additionally, relevant case studies from the hospitality and tourism sector will be incorporated to provide a comprehensive assessment. The present study will employ Butler's life cycle model and Doxey's irridex model to assess the current stage of development of the destination.

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview of the Male

Male, the administrative and commercial centre of the Maldives, is characterised by a high population density, with approximately 150,000 inhabitants residing on the island. The location functions as a pivotal point for administrative, commercial, and cultural pursuits, and is a crucial hub for both tourism and economic advancement. The development management plan for males emphasises the implementation of sustainable tourism practices as a means of ensuring the long-term viability of the destination. The urban region has undergone substantial growth in the tourism sector, with high-end accommodation facilities offering opulent lodging, refined gastronomy, and a wide range of recreational activities. Weerakkody (2016) asserts that these resorts offer opulent accommodations, delectable gastronomy, and a wide range of recreational activities, attracting affluent tourists from different regions of the world. The aforementioned development has enhanced the fiscal sustainability of Male, resulting in economic benefits and job prospects.

2.2. Description of the Destination

The Maldives' administrative and commercial hub is Male, situated on the southern periphery of the North Male Atoll in the Indian Ocean. Male, being the most populous and geographically extensive city, amalgamates conventional and contemporary architectural styles, presenting a vibrant urban centre with narrow thoroughfares and elaborate wooden embellishments. The urban centre serves as a pivotal hub for economic transactions, providing a diverse array of retail establishments, markets, and enterprises that cater to both the indigenous population and visitors. The male demographic holds significant importance in the tourism industry due to its role as the primary gateway for international visitors. The Maldives is renowned for its cultural heritage and historical landmarks, providing leisure prospects such as cultural

festivities and occasions. In general, Male is a metropolitan centre characterised by cultural diversity and dynamism, which harmoniously integrates contemporary amenities with traditional practises. This amalgamation of features provides a plethora of opportunities, attractions, and facilities for both residents and tourists.

3. Sustainable Tourism Development Principles

As per the Maldives Fifth Tourism Master Plan for the period of 2023-2027, the country is committed to achieving global leadership in sustainable tourism. The aforementioned objective is achieved through the provision of top-notch tourism services and the creation of unforgettable experiences for tourists. Additionally, the industry is expected to generate significant and enduring advantages for the community, industry personnel, and tourism and affiliated enterprises. The proposed vision comprises of four fundamental pillars, namely visitors, communities, workers, and businesses.

Visitors are attracted to the natural splendour, varied ecological systems, and inventive hospitality. The tourism industry has the potential to positively impact communities by generating employment opportunities, fostering economic growth, promoting social development, and enhancing accessibility to infrastructure. Personnel acquire professional competencies and prospects for career progression. Market diversification and contemporary business methodologies can enable businesses to attain profitability and enhance their global competitiveness.

3.1. Economic Sustainability

The concept of economic sustainability in Male pertains to the assurance of the city's economic longevity and expansion, while optimising the advantages derived from tourism and other economic undertakings. The following are essential aspects concerning economic sustainability in Male:

Tourism is a significant economic driver in Male and the Maldives, contributing significantly to the overall economy. The urban area draws a noteworthy quantity of global tourists who make a financial contribution to the regional economy by means of expenditures on lodging, food and beverage, retail, and leisure pursuits.

The city of Male has observed the emergence of several upscale resorts that specifically target affluent tourists. The aforementioned resorts offer high-end lodging,

culinary selections, and diverse leisure amenities, drawing in wealthy tourists and yielding significant economic gains for both the urban area and the nation.

The tourism industry in Male provides job prospects for the indigenous populace. Employment opportunities can be found across diverse industries such as hospitality, transportation, retail, and tour operations. The objective of economic sustainability is to guarantee equitable employment practises, the enhancement of skills, and the provision of training opportunities for indigenous inhabitants to reap the rewards of the tourism sector.

Male is pursuing economic diversification beyond tourism in order to improve its economic sustainability. There are ongoing endeavours to diversify the economy by fostering the growth of additional sectors, including finance, trade, and technology, with the aim of enticing foreign investments and establishing a more robust and equitable economic system.

The promotion of economic sustainability necessitates the allocation of resources towards the enhancement of infrastructure development, which in turn facilitates the expansion of diverse economic sectors. The proposed measures encompass the enhancement of transport infrastructure, the modernization of utilities, and the augmentation of connectivity to facilitate commercial operations and bolster the city's overall competitiveness.

3.2. Socio-cultural Sustainability

The objective of socio-cultural sustainability in Male, Maldives is to preserve and promote the local culture, traditions, and communal well-being. Critical elements entail the conservation of cultural heritage, organisation of cultural festivals and events, advancement of community involvement, and creation of economic opportunities for the native populace via indigenous employment and entrepreneurship. The Maldives National Museum exhibits various artefacts and cultural practises, while cultural events such as Independence Day and spiritual observances offer avenues for both native residents and tourists to appreciate Maldivian culture.

The objective of sustainable tourism in Male is to create economic prospects for the native inhabitants by means of local employment and entrepreneurship, thereby promoting an entrepreneurial mindset among the local populace. The promotion of locally owned enterprises and the implementation of training programmes pertaining to tourism are crucial for the development of socio-economic sustainability. The promotion of cultural sensitivity and deference is imperative in augmenting the quality of visitors' experiences. It is incumbent upon tourists to acquaint themselves with and exhibit veneration for the customs, traditions, and societal norms of indigenous communities. This facilitates productive interaction between tourists and the native inhabitants, ensuring the preservation of the genuineness of local practises and beliefs.

3.3. Environmental Sustainability:

The discourse on environmental sustainability in Male, Maldives centres on the conservation of the natural environment, safeguarding marine ecosystems, and mitigating the adverse effects of tourism-related undertakings. The following are significant aspects pertaining to environmental sustainability in Male:

The conservation of coral reefs is a crucial matter, and it has been acknowledged by the male population who have taken steps to safeguard these natural wonders. The endeavours encompass the enactment of regulations aimed at thwarting harmful fishing methods, advocacy for conscientious diving and snorkelling practises, and dissemination of information to enhance public understanding of the vulnerability of coral ecosystems.

The attainment of environmental sustainability in Male is contingent upon the implementation of efficient waste management strategies. This encompasses appropriate waste management, implementation of recycling programmes, and mitigation of plastic pollution. The municipality advocates for the adoption of sustainable and environmentally conscious practises, such as the utilisation of reusable and eco-friendly materials, with the aim of reducing the ecological impact.

The adoption of renewable energy sources is a key focus for Male in order to mitigate the reliance on fossil fuels and address the issue of climate change. The implementation of measures such as the installation of solar power systems and the adoption of energy-efficient practices is instrumental in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and advancing environmental sustainability.

The objective of Biodiversity Protection: Male is to safeguard the varied marine and terrestrial biodiversity present in the Maldives. The process entails the establishment of safeguarded regions, implementation of fishing and hunting regulations, and advancement of educational and research initiatives aimed at conservation.

The issue of freshwater scarcity in small island nations has made sustainable water management practises a crucial concern, as highlighted by Male. This entails advocating for strategies aimed at conserving water, such as rainwater harvesting, efficient irrigation systems, and other related measures.

4. Case Study Analysis

The Maldives, being a nation that heavily depends on the tourism industry for its economic growth, considers sustainable tourism development principles as crucial (Maldives Tourism, 2020). The Maldives has established a variety of regulations and organisations to ensure the sustainable management of its industry. The Ministry of Tourism has implemented a Sustainable Tourism Development Plan (STDP) with the aim of ensuring that the industry is managed in an ecologically responsible manner (Ministry of Tourism, 2020). The Ministry of Tourism (2020) has established a set of principles known as the STDP, which encompasses various aspects such as the advocacy of responsible travel, preservation of natural resources, and promotion of cultural heritage.

The facet of the industry that involves travel is intricately linked to the tenets of sustainable tourism development. The Maldives has instituted a variety of regulatory measures to ensure that travel is conducted in a sustainable fashion. As per the Ministry of Tourism (2020), a Sustainable Tourism Development Plan (STDP) has been instituted to ensure the environmentally responsible management of the industry. The Ministry of Tourism (2020) has delineated a set of principles under the Sustainable Tourism Development Plan (STDP), which encompasses responsible travel, conservation of natural resources, and preservation of cultural heritage.

To warrant a more comprehensive investigation into sustainable tourism development principles in the Maldives, it is imperative to gather empirical data from a case study within the hospitality and tourism industry. An investigation carried out by the Maldives Tourism Board (MTB) in 2017 discovered that the adoption of sustainable tourism measures yielded beneficial outcomes for the environment, economy, and society (MTB, 2017). According to MTB's (2017) findings, the adoption of sustainable tourism strategies yielded favourable outcomes for the neighbouring communities, manifesting in the form of amplified job prospects and supplementary revenue streams for indigenous enterprises.

To summarise, the Maldives, which heavily depends on tourism for its economic advancement, necessitates the implementation of sustainable tourism development principles. The collation of evidence from a case study within the hospitality and

tourism sector is necessary to provide justification for conducting more extensive and comprehensive research. It is imperative to identify practises and delineate the regulations and organisations accountable for their implementation. The interdependence between the travel sector and the industry in question warrants a thorough investigation.

The utilisation of the Butler life cycle model and Doxey's Irridex model has been employed to evaluate the incorporation of sustainable tourism principles within the development management plan of Male Maldives. Butler's conceptual framework delineates the evolutionary trajectory of tourist destinations into five distinct phases (Butler, 1980). On the other hand, Doxey's Irridex model assesses the sustainability of a destination by measuring the level of satisfaction among the local community (Doxey, 1975). Both models offer significant perspectives on the potential for sustainable tourism expansion and community contentment.

4.1. Butler's Life Cycle Model:

According to Butler's life cycle model, the Male Maldives is presently in the growth stage. The assertion is supported by the consistent increase in the number of travellers who visit the nation, coupled with the administration's adoption of measures aimed at promoting sustainable tourism. The nation is presently engaged in the advancement of its infrastructure, as evidenced by the government's allocation of resources towards the construction of fresh hotels, resorts, and other amenities catering to the tourism industry. The government is allocating resources towards the advancement of the nation's promotion, with the objective of augmenting the influx of tourists to the country.

4.2. Doxey's Irridex Model:

According to Doxey's Irridex model, the Male Maldives is presently situated in the 'satisfaction' phase. The country's commitment to providing a superior tourist experience is supported by the high levels of satisfaction reported by visitors and the

government's dedication to this goal. The government has instituted several measures aimed at ensuring a favourable experience for tourists, including the 'Maldives Quality Assurance Programme'. This programme mandates that all businesses conform to rigorous quality standards.

5. Recommendations for Future Development

The Maldives, a popular global tourism destination, has taken various measures to ensure the adoption of sustainable practices. The primary objectives of the Maldives Fifth Tourism Master Plan 2023-2027 (5TMP) are to enhance the economic benefits derived from tourism by maximising visitor expenditure, to establish clear and unambiguous marketing objectives, and to safeguard the country's beaches, sand banks, and marine life. The tourism industry has taken on the responsibility of eliminating single-use plastics, collaborating with relevant stakeholders and island councils to oversee food waste, and integrating renewable energy technologies and energy storage systems.

The implementation of new resorts in the northern and southern regions is of paramount importance, with a focus on attaining net zero emissions, enhancing energy efficiency, adapting to climate change, digitization, and augmenting connectivity. The acquisition of digital skills is imperative for enterprises operating in the tourism industry, and the integration of digital technologies is pivotal for the delivery of services and operational efficiency.

The fundamental aspects of health, safety, and security are of utmost importance, and the establishment of a safety and security culture is imperative. The 5TMP has committed to prioritising inclusive tourism by ensuring that tourism services and infrastructure are accessible to elderly tourists and individuals with disabilities. The government's objective is to execute comprehensive policies as part of the 5TMP programme, with the aim of enhancing the availability of tourism services to all members of society. The implementation of this strategy has the potential to enhance product differentiation, expand the market reach to previously unexplored segments, and improve employment opportunities.

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